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ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

BY THE

REV. J. JONES, M. A.

INCUMBENT OF ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, LIVERPOOL;
AND FORMERLY OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

VOL. I.

13494

LIVERPOOL:

ARTHUR NEWLING, 31, RANELAGH STREET;
LONDON: J. HATCHARD AND SON, PICCADILLY;
HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO. PATERNOSTER ROW.

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PREFACE.

It has been frequently remarked, that whilst multitudes of Sermons are daily issuing from the press, few, comparatively, are free from the imputation of having been either written with an immediate view to publication, or considerably altered in their style and language subsequent to their delivery. And to this cause, perhaps, rather than to any other, may be attributed that beautifully precise, but cold and heartless correctness, which characterizes the majority of published discourses. The careless freedom, and simple pathos of the oral address is transmuted into the rigid formality of an elaborate treatise, or an argu-

mentative essay; and that which was observed to inspire warmth and feeling as it came from the pulpit, produces little or no emotion when presented by the press.

Whatever may be the faults (and, doubtless, they are many,) in the style of the following pages, they will probably be thought to wear a character totally different from that which has just been noticed, and must certainly be attributed to a widely different cause. At all events, the Lectures appear in print almost precisely as they were first penned, and subsequently delivered, and offer no pretensions to any superiority in language or style over the Author's ordinary preparations for the pulpit.

As an apology for their publication, it may be sufficient to plead the wishes of some highly valued friends, who, having heard them with marked attention when spoken to the ear, indulge the charitable expectation that, with God's blessing, they may serve to awaken similar interest when presented to the eye.

May that expectation not be disappointed! May He whose blessed aid was not invoked in vain in their composition and delivery, graciously attend their publication, and perpetuate their usefulness!

The entire series from which this selection has been made, and which comprised the whole of the Acts of the Apostles, was deemed by the Author far too extensive for publication. With a view, however, to keep up the connection of the Sacred History, and to reserve to himself the power of adding another volume to those now printed, should it ever be thought desirable, he has confined his present choice within the limits of the first fifteen Chapters.

St. Andrew's, 1st Nov. 1841.



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LECTURES.

LECTURE I.

Acts i. 1—3.

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.

To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs: being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

IN the study of ecclesiastical history few comparatively feel sufficiently interested. Whilst the secular affairs of empires and of kingdoms are made the subject of daily study and research—whilst volume after volume issues from the press throwing additional light upon the changes which have taken place in states, and constitu-

tions, and laws, and customs, at various times, and in successive ages of the world, how little attention appears to be generally given to the records of the Church, or to the events which have taken place during a period of eighteen hundred years in the kingdom of our Lord! Is there no ground of suspicion furnished here of a lack of interest in the reign of Christianity throughout the world, in the minds of the great majority of our intellectual population? Tell them of the steps which led to the enlargement or dismemberment of an empire—to the erection or overthrow of a monarchy—to the increase of civil liberty, or the formation of a national constitution, and they will lend you a willing ear—they will make it the subject of investigation, and they will discourse upon it with interest. But place before them the maps and charts of Christianity—shew them the records of ancient or of modern times, touching the progress of the gospel—the

prevalence of truth—the dangers encountered from heresy and schism—and the victories which from time to time have been gained over superstition and error—and you will find no interest awakened. The topic is one they are unwilling to pursue, for it borders on a subject remote from their affections—the subject of religion. And herein is the saying of St. John exemplified: “They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us.”

True it is that much of what is called “ecclesiastical history” is little more than a long catalogue of crimes and errors which have defaced the fair form of Christianity—but are there no lessons of humiliation and vigilance to be derived from such testimonies? Do they yield no proof of the necessity of watching against the progress of false doctrine among professing Christians? Do they

not loudly re-echo to us as a protestant people, and as a national church, the important exhortations of Scripture, “to hold fast the form of sound words”—and not to “sell the truth,” which, at the blessed era of the Reformation, was repurchased by the blood of our martyred forefathers? What though disgust may be excited in our minds by a review of the immoralities which prevailed at one age, and of the debasing superstition which was dominant at another? What though horror and indignation may sometimes be the result of our historical inquiries, when we read of the treachery, the tyranny, the cruelty of Popes and Conclaves—of Legates and Inquisitors? The indignation, the horror, the disgust, may all prove salutary to ourselves and our posterity—may all conspire to fill our hearts with gratitude for a Protestant Church and a Protestant Queen—and put us upon our guard, lest by any unsuspecting confidence in an arm of flesh, we

endanger the perpetuity and safety of our exalted privileges. But whilst ecclesiastical history in general may be thus turned to good account by a careful and devout student, it cannot be denied that to pursue it with advantage much study, and considerable scholarship are requisite. To arrive at the truth one writer must be read with another, and one testimony confronted with another. What wise man would depend upon the representations of a party statement? Who would receive the annals of Rome as an unvarnished tale from the hands of a Cardinal? Or, as it respects the ecclesiastical history of our own country, who, but the simplest novice, would form his opinions from the picture which some Roman Catholic writer may have endeavoured to draw?

Still, however, ecclesiastical history, in its most important features, and at its earliest era, is within the reach of all. I ask for no more learning than that of being able to read the English language

to justify the humblest individual in this assembly in commencing this evening a course of ecclesiastical history of the most interesting and instructive kind—a history which details the progressive steps of Christianity during the first age of her existence, when as yet her doctrines were uncorrupted by the inventions of men, and her practice, for the most part, conformable to her professions—a history too which may be implicitly relied upon, unbiased by prejudice, and without a shade of misrepresentation in the whole of its composition.

The history to which I allude, and which I purpose, if God permit, to make the subject of a series of Lectures in this Church on Sunday evenings, is that of the “Acts of the Apostles.” It forms the fifth and last of the historical books of the New Testament, and may be properly regarded as a kind of supplement to the gospels, and a most important connecting link between them and the epistles.

It is not, indeed, by any means a complete history of the Church of Christ even during its infant state, nor was it intended to do more than first to give a sketch of the important transactions which took place in Jerusalem immediately after our Lord's crucifixion, and then to confine the narrative, for the most part, to the principal events in the lives of St. Peter and St. Paul,—comprising a period of about thirty years.

As a history of undoubted authenticity, it affords the most abundant evidence of the truth of Christianity, and of its heavenly and divine origin. It shews us in the most satisfactory manner that the religion of Jesus, unlike that of Mahomed, made its mighty progress through the world, not by fraud and violence, but by “speaking the truth in love” amidst every species of obloquy, hardship, and persecution. It was not by the power of the sword, but in spite of the sword—not by cunningly devised fables, but by the manifestation

of the truth to every man's conscience—not by the tinselled eloquence of man's wisdom, but by the foolishness of preaching—not by state patronage and preferment, but by that exhibition of Christ crucified, which was to the unbelieving Jew a stumbling block, and to the reasoning Greek the climax of folly—but to them that believe, whether Jews or Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

How admirably is this sublime triumph of Christianity over all that lets and hinders in this lower world exhibited in the narratives of the Apostles! Though men of like passions with ourselves—though poor, and, for the most part, unlearned in the estimation of “philosophy falsely so called”—they made such an impression upon the hearts and minds of myriads of all classes of mankind throughout the greater part of the Roman empire, as had never before been heard or seen. Yet it was not they—it was their testimony that gained the

triumphs of Christianity. They took no credit to themselves—they affected no reputation for consummate skill, or profound judgment, or exalted genius. It was to their testimony that they called the attention of the world—a testimony which they declared to be faithful and worthy of all acceptation, and which they challenged all men every where to disprove, that “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,” and that as he “died for our sins,” so also he “rose again for our justification,” ascended into heaven, and now sitteth at the right hand of God, angels and authorities being made subject to him.

Nor was it their testimony alone that effected so mighty a revolution in the opinions, and character, and conduct of mankind—it was that marvellous outpouring of supernatural influence, of which we shall have soon to speak, and which rendered their testimony like a “fire that melteth, and like a hammer that breaketh

the rock in pieces.” Hence it was that their statements of gospel truth, which are no other than those which the ordinary ministers of Christianity now employ, produced such gigantic effects—overcoming obstacles that nothing human could overcome, and spreading conviction with the speed of lightning from one region to another, from one nation to another people. “The weapons of their warfare were not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

In addition to some very interesting details connected with this marvellous conversion of “Jews and Greeks, Barbarians, Scythians, bond and free,” we have frequent intimations in this history of the evidences which the Apostles gave of the truth of their doctrines—of the manner in which they appealed to the history

and prophecies of the Old Testament—and of the patient continuance in every good work, which they inculcated upon their converts, and exemplified in their own conduct.

And then the coincidences between this sacred narrative and the several Epistles, written by different Apostles, at different times, under different circumstances, and from different and distant places, are too many and too striking, not to render every inquiring mind on the subject of the truth of Christianity most grateful to that divine Providence which has so carefully preserved it in the Church, after having assigned it an early admission into the sacred canon.

To any one acquainted with the writings of Dr. Paley, it is sufficient to refer to his “*Horæ Paulinæ*” to shew how strong and irrefragable an argument to the truth of Christianity is furnished by such incidental circumstances as are here recorded, and which tally with the Epistles in circum-

stances too multiplied and too minute to allow the most sceptical to suppose that they were imaginary and designed. There is the same spirit of integrity—the same love of truth—the same devout simplicity of mind and manner in this as in every other portion of the sacred writings.

That the writer of this valuable history was the Evangelist Luke is not only the unanimous testimony of the fathers, but is plainly deducible from the language with which the narrative itself begins. “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandment unto the Apostles, whom he had chosen.” Now by turning to the opening passage in St. Luke’s gospel you will perceive at once that the writer and the person addressed are in both cases the same. “Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most

surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed."

The "former treatise," then, referred to in the text is, beyond all question, the Gospel narrative ascribed to St. Luke, who is therefore equally proved to be the writer of the history before us.

Before we enter more fully into the consideration of his testimony, it may be well to be reminded of some of the leading particulars of his own life. These are not numerous: for though his writings are considerable, he is remarkably silent respecting himself. Indeed the only mention which he makes of himself is by using the first person plural in some of his narrations of St. Paul's travels.

By some of the ancient fathers he is supposed to have been one of the seventy disciples chosen by our Lord; in which case he must doubtless have been privileged to witness many of those astonishing miracles, and to hear many of those sublime discourses, which he has recorded in his Gospel. Yet it would seem from his expression "Even as they delivered them to us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word," that this was not the case, but that he simply, under the superintendence of the Holy Ghost, narrated the particulars of our Lord's history, as he received them from the lips of the Apostles. And with this agrees the more general tradition that he was converted to Christianity whilst residing at Antioch, a chief town in his native country, Syria.

From a passage in St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, iv. 14, we learn that St. Luke's original profession was that of medicine, and that he was residing at that

time with the Apostle : “ Luke the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.” But though St. Paul thus speaks of him in the language of affection and esteem, he never styles him his “ son ” as he does Timothy and Titus—from which some have inferred that he was not an immediate convert of St. Paul’s, but previously convinced of the truths of Christianity.

The first notice which he gives us of himself in the history before us occurs in the 16th chapter, 10th and 11th verses, where he speaks of himself as in company with the Apostle at Troas, and as sailing with him from thence to Macedonia, in obedience to the vision which St. Paul had seen, exhorting him to come over and help the inhabitants of that country. After this St. Luke appears to have accompanied the Apostle through all his journeyings in various parts of Asia, and finally to have sailed with him to Rome, when he was carried thither as a prisoner, having appealed unto Cæsar. There he abode

with him during his two years' confinement; and with that circumstance the history itself closes upon our view.

With these introductory observations I now proceed to a brief consideration of the remaining portion of our text.

Having stated that his former treatise extended to the last appearance of our Lord to his disciples, when he was taken up from them into heaven, after that he had given them the instructions which their trying situation required,—he adds, in the 3rd verse, that our Lord was frequently seen by them in the interval between his crucifixion and ascension, during a period of no less than forty days. “To whom, (says he) he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” By “infallible proofs,” the Evangelist evidently means, signs, tokens, or evidences, so numerous and decisive that it was not possible for those who witnessed

them to be deceived. Of the many interviews which thus took place between our risen Lord and his disciples no less than eight are recorded by the Evangelists. And how full and decisive the evidence which those interviews afforded ! He ate with them—he drank with them—he sat with them—he walked with them—he conversed with them. He condescended to give them even tangible proof by calling upon the incredulous Thomas to come and handle his sacred body, with all its wounds and lacerations fresh upon him. “ Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side ; and be not faithless, but believing.”

It is vain to endeavour to account for the belief with which the Apostles were inspired, by supposing that they were imposed upon by their own imagination—that they readily gave credence to what they wished and sought to believe. So far from being forward to credit the reports which

were first given of their Lord's resurrection, they hastily concluded that they were "idle tales;" and it was not until they were favoured with ocular demonstration that they dared to believe verily that he was risen from the dead. "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel," was their desponding and unbelieving language to the mysterious stranger which accosted two of them on their way to Emmaus; and so backward were they to exercise faith in the promised event, that our Lord upbraided them on that occasion with being "slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets had spoken;—that Christ should thus suffer, and enter into his glory."

It will be still more evident that the disciples were not under the influence of a false imagination in the reception which they were compelled to give to this cardinal truth of Christianity, if we bear in mind, that the appearances of our Lord were witnessed not by separate individuals

of their number, but by companies of them—sometimes by the whole body of the eleven Apostles, and at one time by a multitude amounting to not less than five hundred disciples. Unlike also all fanciful visions, and illusions of the mind, these appearances were not transient and momentary, but lasting for a considerable time, so as to admit of the leisurely occupations of taking food—walking to a distance—standing on the sea-shore, whilst Peter and his companions were engaged in taking a miraculous draught of fishes—and actually expounding to two of them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Some of these appearances were sudden and unexpected, whilst others were the result of previous appointment. Nor is it a little remarkable that the interviews with his disciples took place not in the obscurity of the night, when imagination might be busy and easily imposed upon, but in the clear light of day. In short,

there was no species of reasonable evidence which was not abundantly and superabundantly supplied to the Apostles, as those who were to go forth into all lands proclaiming the salvation of a once crucified, but now risen Lord. It was no hearsay evidence that they recapitulated; they stated the things which they had seen, that were "eye-witnesses of the majesty" of the Messiah.

What excuse, then, can infidels advance in justification of their unbelief? Hear what they ignorantly and foolishly affirm. They say that the witnesses were exclusively our Lord's own disciples—that he did not appear to any, who, through a want of interest in his cause, were alone capable of escaping the charge of an undue bias.

But did he not appear, we would ask, to a band of Roman soldiers previously even to his appearance to his own followers? So fully were those heathen warriors convinced that he really rose from the dead,

that it required large sums of money to bribe them into a constrained silence on the subject, or rather to the maintenance of an obvious and deliberate falsehood.

But there were sufficient reasons in the divine mind to refrain from exhibiting the risen Saviour to the rulers of the nation. They had evidence enough in the testimony of the men whom they had themselves placed as guardians of the sacred tomb, and who confessed that they shook with terror at what they beheld, and became as powerless as dead men, when the angel came and rolled away the massive stone from the mouth of the sepulchre.

Nor was this all. Miraculous attestations of this event were given them by God through the instrumentality of the Apostles: notable miracles were done by the hands of the witnesses in the sight of all men, nor could they gainsay or deny it. These unprotected, and once timid men, now stood forth in the face of the world and

declared that they were ready to encounter persecution, and torture, and death itself in testimony of the truth of this sublime and all important fact. They said; "We are eye-witnesses of his resurrection, and here is our proof in the miracles which we perform by virtue of his authority and power. It is not in our own name, but in his that we heal the sick, and cast out devils, and raise the dead."

With such evidence then, presented to their very senses, what excuse can be alleged for their unbelief? No excuse can be offered: they hardened their hearts and shut out conviction from their mind: and in them was fulfilled the declaration of the patriarch Abraham in the parable, "If they believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they believe though one rose from the dead."

And now, dear brethren, let me add, in conclusion, a few practical reflections to all that I have advanced.—If God has

graciously secured to us so important a record of all that Jesus began both to do and teach whilst upon earth ; how zealously should we study both his discourses and his actions, and endeavour, by strength from on high, to copy the one, and to believe and obey the other ! There is no knowledge to be compared in point either of interest or of importance with the knowledge of Jesus. “ This is life eternal,” (I quote his own declaration) “ to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” “ Yea, doubtless,” exclaims the Apostle Paul, “ and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection,

and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”

Of the actions and the sayings of other men we may remain ignorant, and suffer no loss. But with the actions of Jesus we have all intimately and everlastingly to do. What he did, he did for us men and for our salvation. For us he fulfilled the law—working out for us a robe of spotless righteousness, in which, as believers, we may stand accepted in the presence of a holy God, and sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. In his whole conduct also he has “set us an example that we should walk in his steps.” With his doings, then, we should make ourselves familiar, as with the copy which we should aspire to imitate, and as the standard we should strive to reach.—But in order to do this effectually and to any saving purpose we must seek to have the same mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus. Unless his Spirit be in us we are distinctly assured that we are none of his.

And then as to all that our Redeemer said and taught, how important that we should give it a hearty and an unreserved reception. The words which he spake, they are spirit, and they are life. Never man spake like this man. But it is not enough to admire and commend them. They must be treasured up in our memories and in our hearts—they must influence our conversation in the world—they must purify and prepare us for communion with him in heaven. “Now are ye clean,” says he to his disciples, “through the word which I have spoken unto you.” “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”

Forget not at the same time the sufferings of Christ and the glory which followed. Oh what sufferings were those which this evangelist so touchingly records in his gospel narrative! Think of his passion in the garden—think of his soul sorrowful even unto death—think of his unutterable grief, forcing great drops

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of blood from his agonized brow—think of his “strong crying and tears unto him that was able to deliver him from death, and was heard in that he feared,”—and remember that in all that he suffered, he suffered for you—the “just for the unjust, that he might bring you unto God.”

Remember, also, that for you he shewed himself alive after his passion—having been put to death in the flesh, he was quickened by the Spirit—having been crucified through weakness, he now liveth by the power of God. And what a ground of unspeakable consolation have you here! “Fear not,” says he, “I am the First and the Last: I am He that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”—Every infallible proof of your Lord’s resurrection is assuredly a pledge of your own. For what is your connection with Jesus, provided only you are united to him by a living faith? Your connection with him is the most intimate that can be conceived—it is that of branches incor-

porated with the trunk—that of members connected with the head. Where the head is, there also shall the members be: if ye die with him, ye shall also live with him.

But as a prelude to your rising in hope and peace at the last day, satisfied with his likeness—seek now, in heart and mind, thither to ascend, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God in majesty and glory. “If ye be risen with Christ set your affections on things above, not on things which be on the earth.” Let the power of your Lord’s resurrection be exhibited in the subjugation of your passions—your wayward desires—your ambitious aspirations. And rest not satisfied with any thing short of taking up, in sincerity of heart, the language of the Apostle, and saying, “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.” Thus dying unto sin and living unto righteousness, you shall have your fruit unto holiness, and your end everlasting life.

LECTURE II.

ACTS i. 3—5.

To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs: being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence.

WHAT effect death will produce in the believer's spiritual condition, or what changes will be wrought in his entire being, at the period of the resurrection, are questions which we naturally and earnestly ask. But whence may we expect

a satisfactory reply? To what source of information shall we look? The Christian instinctively replies, "to the word of God." There, and there alone, do we meet with any tidings of the invisible world on which we can dare to repose our confidence. The speculations of philosophers may amuse, but can never satisfy an inquiring mind. The dreams and fancies of a heated imagination are little better than the classic fables of olden times, in which the poets of Greece and Rome were wont to indulge. It is only by the inspiration of the Almighty that any human being can announce to his fellows the things which he hath neither heard nor seen, and which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive. Nor is it enough to claim the high privilege of inspiration: the claim must be proved and established on evidence which cannot be gainsayed, else the insane rhapsodies of any visionary fanatic might justify the credence of his deluded followers. Blessed be God for the measure

of information which it hath pleased him to grant us by his servants the Prophets! They spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and to their sure, their most sure word, we shall do well to “take heed, as to a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts.”

‘But we long for something more explicit than even the inspired declarations of prophets’—may be the secret language of our hearts. ‘We want to hear the testimony of one who has himself passed through the gate of death, and who has himself experienced the mighty power of the resurrection upon his earthly tabernacle. Or, if this be too much to expect, we ask for the testimony of those who have seen such an individual, who knew him before he expired, and could identify him after his resurrection—and who being certified of the facts both of his death and resurrection, had also the privilege of conversing with him on topics connected with futurity.’

This desire, brethren, our heavenly Father has graciously anticipated—this additional and most important testimony he has condescendingly given. In the person of his only begotten Son, our blessed Redeemer Jesus Christ, he has vouchsafed to us the evidence we require. By him “life and immortality have been brought visibly into light.” Not only did he prove himself to have actually risen, (which he might have done by the mere fulfilment of some prediction, or by the execution of some signal judgment upon his murderers,) but he exhibited himself to the public as well as private view of all his disciples. Nor was he merely seen by them—he conversed with them, and that, not once nor twice, but many times, during a period of no less than forty days.

This is a most important thing to be remembered in connection with the “many infallible proofs” of our Lord’s resurrection, to which your attention was directed in the preceding Lecture. “Forty days,”

says the sacred historian, “he was seen of them, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” The testimonies of the Apostles then, respecting death and judgment, and eternity—respecting the immortality of the soul, the intermediate state, the resurrection of the body, and the everlasting destinies of the righteous and the wicked, are the testimonies of men who were not only inspired as were the Prophets of the ancient dispensation, (who lived in the twilight, as it were, of Christianity,) but of men who were privileged to see and converse with the Lord of life himself, subsequently to his resurrection from the dead.

To this surpassing claim to the implicit credence of mankind the Apostle John calls the attention of his readers in the opening of his first epistle, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life ; (for the

life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

'But the Apostle Paul,' it may be urged, 'was not a disciple of our Lord till long after his resurrection from the dead;' and his writings form a large proportion of the epistolary part of the New Testament—how then can his declarations on the points alluded to be invested either with the same interest or the same conclusiveness as those of the other Apostles, who could testify to their having seen and heard their risen Lord?

Now as it is customary with sceptics (of whom there are too many in the world around us, and by whose infidel suggestions the faith of our young people especially is in danger of being shaken)

to object to the testimony of St. Paul as of inferior value to that of the other apostles, it may be well to be reminded, on the present occasion, of some of those passages which may be adduced to shew that the objection is altogether groundless, and that those who urge it argue on premises that are absolutely false. They assume that St. Paul was never privileged either to behold the Redeemer subsequently to his resurrection, or to receive any instructions from him except through the medium of other teachers. That this assumption is absolutely opposed to the truth may be seen, in the first place, by a reference to the history of his miraculous conversion as detailed in the ninth chapter of this book. We are there^a distinctly told, that the Apostle actually beheld our Lord on the occasion. Ananias, putting his hands on him, said, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way

^a Verse 17.

as thou camest, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.” — And this is further proved by a passage which you will find in the 22d chapter of this book, in which St. Paul is himself the speaker, and is giving to the incensed Hebrews, in their own tongue, a more enlarged account of this his miraculous interview with Christ. At the 12th verse he states as follows : “ And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, came unto me and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men, of what thou hast seen and heard.”

Such are the historical statements cor-

roborative of the fact that St. Paul was not only inspired by the supernatural influences of the Holy Spirit, but that he was gifted to see in a most extraordinary manner his risen Lord, and to receive from his own lips the instructions which he was to impart to mankind. And that St. Paul attached the utmost importance to this fact is abundantly evident from several incidental remarks in his epistles. Turn, for instance, to 1 Corinthians ix. 1, where he connects with the privilege of being an apostle, and of being thus free from all ecclesiastical subjection to other men, the fact that he had seen the Saviour. "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?"

Again, in the 15th chapter of the same epistle, we meet with a remarkable passage, which when compared with another in the epistle to the Galatians, is most instructive and conclusive. "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have

received, and wherein ye stand ; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures : and that he was buried, and that he arose again the third day according to the scriptures : and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve. After that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once ; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James ; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”^b Here, you observe, St. Paul not only says that Christ was “seen of him,”—but “seen of him *also*,” i. e. as well as by the other apostles. He places his appearance to him in juxtaposition with his previous appearances to Cephas, to the twelve, to the five hundred brethren, and to James.

^b 1 Corinthians xv. 1, &c.

But this testimony is still more striking when you compare it (as I have already intimated) with a passage in his epistle to the Galatians, in which he is compelled by the sinister misrepresentations of false teachers, to insist upon his apostolic authority, and the sure ground of confidence which was afforded to his converts in the fact that he delivered to them the pure gospel of Christ, as he had himself received it from the Saviour's lips. In chapter i. 9, he observes, "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Such are some of the passages which go to prove, beyond the possibility of refutation, that St. Paul spake not only as he was moved by the Holy Ghost, but likewise as he was commissioned and empowered to speak by the Lord Jesus Christ in person, subsequently to his resurrection from the dead. That the other Apostles did the same is admitted by all who give credit to St. Luke in the opening passage in our text, in which he says that during the time that intervened between the resurrection of Christ and his ascension into heaven, a period of forty days, he “spake to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

And in all this, brethren, we have not only a firm basis on which to rest our faith, but a most satisfactory answer to the foolish reasonings of those who, in their hostility to the vital doctrines of Christianity, maintain that the writings of the Apostles are of less authority than those of the Gospels, and that nothing should be pressed upon

their belief and acceptance on the testimony of St. Peter, St. James, St. John, St. Jude, or St. Paul, unless it can be corroborated by some passage or other in the discourses of our Lord.

Now consider the absurdity as well as impiety of such a sentiment. Taking the statements of the Apostles on the low ground of credible testimony only—apart from all consideration of their inspiration, they deserve the most implicit confidence, and may be expected, at the same time, to contain much that is but slightly touched upon by the Evangelists. If they are not worthy of hearty and unreserved credence in the epistles, why trust them in their transmission of our Lord's discourses in the gospels? Or, if they are to be devoutly credited whilst handing down to us the truths spoken by our Lord before his resurrection, why should less respect be paid to their testimony whilst communicating to us the sentiments which he uttered subsequently to that event? In both cases the

validity of their testimony must be equally strong.

The only question then seems to be this,—Did our blessed Lord vouchsafe to the Apostles after his resurrection any new doctrine, or any enlarged views of doctrines to which he had adverted previously to his death? A question this which may be easily solved. Whilst there were some things of which they were totally ignorant in the lifetime of our Lord, there were many in which they were very imperfectly informed, as we may gather from his own testimony. “Are ye yet,” he asks, “without understanding?” “Do ye not know?” “Why reason ye in your hearts?” “I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” Is it to be supposed, then, that in the frequent communications which our Lord had with them after his resurrection, when they were about to be sent forth as the heralds of his salvation to Jews and Gentiles, and to appear before kings and governors, and to “give every where a

reason of the hope that was in them," he did not vouchsafe to them some new and extended views of Christian truth? When he spoke to them, as our text declares, during forty days, of "the things pertaining to the kingdom of God," it is utterly incredible that he would confine himself to the mere repetition of what he had formerly declared. And that he did not so confine himself is evident from one or two specimens of his conversation subsequently to his resurrection, which we find in the Gospel narratives. In his interview, for instance, with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus we are told, that "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." And after his departure, "they said one to another, Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" In his interview also with some of his disciples on the evening of the same day, he said unto them, "These are

the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures.”

But how enlarged soever the minds of the Apostles had become on the doctrines of Christianity, in consequence of these frequent and instructive interviews with their risen Lord, they were to receive still higher qualifications, and to be still further illumined, before they stood forth as his accredited ambassadors. For this they were patiently and devoutly to wait, agreeably to the direction of their Lord in the words we are considering. “And being assembled together with them, he commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me : for John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”

The promise for which they were commanded to wait is here called “the promise of the Father,” inasmuch as it is the Father who sends the Holy Ghost to give effect to the death of his Son in the conversion and sanctification of sinners ; and because his faithfulness was pledged for the mission of the Saviour in many passages of the Old Testament, particularly in the words of the prophet Joel, which St. Peter declares to have been fulfilled on the day of Pentecost: “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions ; and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days, will I pour out my spirit.”

This promise of the Father by the prophets had been frequently referred to by our Lord in his discourses with his disciples, particularly in his farewell discourse just before his crucifixion. “If ye love me, (he remarks in John xiv. 15, &c.) keep

my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever ; even the Spirit of truth. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you ; but the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” And again, in chapter xv. 26, 27, “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, he shall testify of me : and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.”

Such was the promise of the Father which they had heard of him. The Holy Ghost, in all his sanctifying and ennobling influences, was to descend upon them in rich effusion, and herein they were to be distinguished as the disciples and promulgators of that religion for the esta-

blishment of which he had come into the world. This faithful forerunner, it is true, baptized his disciples with water, in token of repentance, and thereby prepared the way before him ; but they should be baptized in the course of a few days with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

The Baptist, although greater than the prophets, could only apply the element of water as an outward symbol of the purification of his disciples from their guilt and defilement ; but He who was preferred before him, and whose shoe's latchet he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose, would bestow upon their waiting souls those divine influences which would at once purify and strengthen them, and not only so, but endow them also with miraculous powers. Yes, and as he elsewhere intimates, they should, when thus gifted from on high, do even more mighty wonders than he himself had performed. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also ;

and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father.”

In the account, also, which the evangelist Mark gives us, at the close of his narrative of our Lord's last interview with his disciples, we find him alluding to the same miraculous gifts which should characterize the reception of the truth under the coming dispensation of the Spirit. “And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents: and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them. They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”

On the marvellous effects produced on the apostles by the fulfilment of this promise of the Father, on the day of Pentecost, we cannot now dwell at length. But surely enough has been said to shew, that as the apostles were favoured with much information pertaining to the kingdom of God from the lips of our blessed

Lord subsequently to his resurrection, and shortly afterwards were endowed with miraculous powers, and divinely inspired, their testimony should be received with implicit confidence, and with unbounded gratitude to God ; and instead of invidiously comparing their writings with the discourses of our Lord, and disparaging them as of inferior authority, we should rather regard them as the medium through which our Saviour is pleased to convey fuller information on the things which belong to our peace, than in the days of his flesh he thought fit to communicate.

How foolish, then, and unwise to slight or undervalue the testimony of the apostles, —or to argue with some, that the way of salvation is more clearly pointed out in the gospels than in the epistles. Nay, it is more than foolish—it is more than unwise—it is wicked, ungrateful, and profane,—and involves in its very nature the crime of slighting the Saviour himself. Hear his own solemn warning on this subject

in his discourse with the seventy. "He that heareth you, heareth me ; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me ; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." And in similar terms does he speak to his twelve Apostles after taking with them his last supper. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send, receiveth me ; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me."

Learn then, my brethren, to reverence the sentiments of the Apostles as the sentiments of him by whose spirit they were enlightened. Recognize in them the voice of your risen Lord. All the particulars of his converse with them after his resurrection are not given us in the Gospels : on the contrary, very little is professed to be given ; whilst much, very much, is said to have transpired. St. John, at the close of his narrative, after detailing some particulars, adds this remarkable testimony : "This is the disciple which testified of these things, and wrote these

things, and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written ;” i.e. the particulars are infinitely too numerous to be recorded. But is it no consolation to know that the writings of the Apostles are imbued with the sentiments which they thus derived from their condescending Lord? and that it is not so much they that speak, as the spirit and the testimony of Christ which was in them?

Go, then, to that portion of God’s word which some of you, perhaps, are conscious that you have hitherto too much neglected—and hear what they declare who were privileged to converse with their risen Lord—with One who, after descending into the grave and “tasting death for every man,” did afterwards burst its iron bands, and came forth in the radiance of life and immortality, and revealed unto

his chosen servants the things which had been kept secret since the foundation of the world.

You will find in the Epistles a most beautiful exhibition of divine truths, some of which are only glanced at in other parts of scripture. The doctrine of the atonement—of conversion—of justification by faith—of sanctification by the Holy Spirit—and of final glorification—though all more or less adverted to in the writings of the prophets, and in the discourses of our Lord, are here set forth in such fullness and such clearness, as to leave our ignorance without excuse.

But whilst you resort unto this portion of the inspired word for the last and clearest developement of the truth as it is in Jesus, remember that the object to be aimed at is not a mere intellectual knowledge of the doctrines of Christianity, but an experimental acquaintance with their transforming and sanctifying power. In vain shall you become wise, unless wise unto

salvation—in vain shall you become theoretically right, if you remain experimentally and practically wrong. The Apostles dwell much on the corruption of our nature, and the absolute necessity of a change of heart. Have you been led to bewail that corruption—and has your heart been truly changed? They proclaim a Saviour all sufficient—able to save even to the uttermost all that come unto him—and they invite all men to his cross. Have you so felt your need of him and so believed their testimony as to commit your souls unto him in penitence and faith? They declare that those whom he justifies, he also sanctifies—and that those who name his name should depart from iniquity. Have you been honestly endeavouring to illustrate this position in your own temper, and spirit, and conduct, and to adorn the doctrine of Christ your Saviour in all things?

Are any of you ready to reply, “ Who is sufficient for these things? We can read

the testimonies of Apostles, and even desire to experience what they insist upon and recommend, but we cannot illuminate our own minds, nor change our own hearts.” True, and it is well to know and feel it to be true—but are we not reminded in our text of “the promise of the Father?” There was much that was special, no doubt, in that which was given to the Apostles; but we also have a promise equally plain, and equally sure to all the seed—a promise, that he will take away the heart of stone and give to us a heart of flesh—that he will sprinkle clean water upon us, and cleanse us from all our defilement—that he will bestow upon us the life-giving influences of his Spirit, and enable us to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil; and finally, that he will make us more than conquerors through him that loved us.

But then this promise is, in a certain sense, conditional—it is accompanied by an obligation on our part. What is that condition—what is that obligation? Pre-

cisely similar to that which was imposed upon the Apostles in the instance before us. They were to wait for it at Jerusalem—in the place where Jesus had intimated his intention to meet them, and hold communion with them—the scene of his recent sufferings, and the emblem of his future Church. But it was not in indolence that they waited, but in the attitude of vigilance and devotion. They met together, from time to time, in supplication and prayer ; and they looked with eager desire for the promised blessing as they that watch for the morning.

So also do ye ! The promise is “you shall have, you shall find, it shall be opened to you”—the command is, “ask”—“seek”—“knock.” And where can you thus ask, and seek, and knock, but at Jerusalem—in the sacred city of Christ’s Church,—in the use of all the appointed ordinances,—and amid those sacred scenes in which Jesus is evidently set forth, crucified amongst us ?

But what is really the state of the case with multitudes of professed disciples to whom the promise of the Father has not been fulfilled? They do not wait for it at Jerusalem—they do not earnestly and perseveringly seek for it in a regular and devout attendance on all the means of grace. They come perhaps occasionally to the sacred courts of the Lord, and they sit as his people sit, and appear unto men to wait,—but there is no longing of the soul, no inward desire, no patient and persevering expectation—and thus they come and go, without experiencing a change,—without realizing the promised blessing.

It may have been the case with some who have assembled with us here, at this time. You have come hither, it may be, from custom, or curiosity, or it may be by constraint, in obedience to another. And are you not conscious that you have derived no benefit from the attendance? What then shall I say to you? Shall I discourage your at-

tendance, and advise you to refrain from coming until you come with proper sentiments and feelings? Oh, if I did, I should prove myself a most mistaken pastor, and most opposite in sentiment and feeling to the great and only good shepherd of the flock. No, brethren! the blame which attaches itself to you is not that being unprepared, you come—but that you come unprepared. Deliberately to stay away will only aggravate your spiritual malady—instead of softening, it will harden but the more—instead of lessening, will increase your guilt. Besides, though all who wait in God's appointed way for a blessing will most certainly obtain it—it does not follow that none others will be blessed: on the contrary God is sometimes found of them that seek him not; and made manifest unto them that ask not after him. Yes! and there have been those who though they have gone to the Temple of the Lord to mock, have remained to pray.

But whilst I reiterate the commandment of your Saviour that you should “not depart from Jerusalem,” let me exhort, beseech, and implore you to come at all times with an earnest desire to obtain a blessing to your souls, and thus to “wait for the promise of the Father.” And be assured that you shall not wait in vain. “The vision is yet for an appointed time : but at the end it shall speak, and not lie : though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come,—it will not tarry.”

LECTURE III.

ACTS i. 20—26.

For it is written in the book of psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and, His bishoprick let another take.

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us, all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,

That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

It is difficult to conceive how painful were the feelings of the Apostles, and of

the brethren who assembled with them in the upper room, when they contemplated the treachery of Judas, and the horrible circumstances connected with his death, as related in the preceding verses. Among the many uneasy reflections to which those events would give rise, perhaps the following might be one: ‘What a hindrance must all this prove to the progress of our Master’s cause! How will the world taunt us with having had such a wretch for our companion! How will they deny that he who could be thus betrayed by one of his immediate followers was any thing but an impostor!’

If such, however, were their reflections, St. Peter’s address to them in the passage before us must have served speedily to impart to them more cheering and encouraging thoughts. He tells them, in the first place, that, unexpected as these tragical events might seem, they had all been foretold and predicted in the ancient Scriptures—and secondly, that in accord-

ance with the same Scriptures another should be divinely appointed to fill up the number of the twelve. "Men and brethren," he observes, "this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas."—Instead of being stumbled or surprised at what had occurred, their faith ought rather to be confirmed thereby. And instead of its giving to their adversaries an advantage in argument, it furnished fresh evidence to the truth of Christianity.

As to any misgivings which might have arisen in their own minds, it was sufficient for them to call to remembrance some of our Lord's intimations of what was about to happen whilst they partook with him of the Paschal feast. That he knew that he should be betrayed, and betrayed by one of them, was evident from that solemn and significant declaration, "Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." And that he well knew who of all

their number was the guilty individual, was equally manifest from the language which he employed in reply to the anxious and sorrowful inquiry which each of them put to him in turn, "Lord, is it I?" "And he answered and said, he that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me." "The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born." "Then Judas which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said." And not only so, but when St. John asked him privately at table, who it was of whom he spake, Jesus answered, "He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon."

But though all misgivings on the part of the disciples themselves would be silenced by such recollections, yet to

furnish them with proofs which they might successfully urge upon others, it was necessary to appeal to records which the nation professed to venerate, and to shew from their own Scriptures that the treachery and the doom of Judas were the subjects of ancient prophecy. And that many such testimonies are furnished by the inspired penmen of the Old Testament I need not now stay to prove. I would only remind you of one striking passage which our Saviour himself quoted from the 41st Psalm, whilst discoursing with his disciples on the memorable occasion when he washed their feet. You will find it recorded in the thirteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. Having taken his garments and sat down again, and explained to them the reason of the condescending act which he had just performed, he says to them in the 17th verse, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. I speak not of you all; I know whom I have chosen; but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that

eateth bread with me, hath lift up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he."

Thus was it ordered in the mysterious providence of the Most High, that an event which, under ordinary circumstances, would prove a stumbling block to believers, and a triumph to infidels, was made subservient to the confusion of the one, and to the strengthening and edification of the other.

But not to dwell on this general view of the subject, let us notice briefly, but particularly, the two several predictions quoted by the Apostle Peter in the text. "For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein;" and, "His bishoprick let another take." The first of these passages is taken from Psalm lxix. 25—a psalm which is evidently prophetic of our Saviour's history, and frequently referred to as such by himself and his Apostles. The quo-

tation is not indeed literally given us by St. Peter,—for in the Hebrew Bible the pronouns are not in the singular but the plural number. The prediction doubtless extended to the whole Jewish nation, whose “house would be left unto them desolate” in consequence of their rejection of the Messiah. But it bore nevertheless a more peculiar and specific reference to him who was, in wickedness and treachery, their head and representative,—and who was afterwards to be known as “the guide of them that took Jesus.” The punishment therefore, as well as the sin of Israel is pourtrayed in his person, and the same punishment is applicable to him and to his countrymen.^c

And as this prediction pointed out his miserable doom, and his entire forfeiture of office in the kingdom of the Messiah, so does the other, which is quoted from the 109th psalm, signify the duty of substituting another in his room: “And his

^c Bp. Horne in loco.

bishopric, or office, or charge, let another take." That this psalm, as well as the 69th, is to be considered as descriptive, and predictive of the wickedness and consequent punishment of the traitors, and murderers, and enemies of the Messiah, there can be no question. They are both appealed to in the writings of the New Testament, and abound with denunciations of woe such as are scarcely any where else to be found. So replete indeed are these and some other psalms with awful and alarming declarations respecting the wicked, that many timid and ill-instructed persons, regarding them in the light of resentful imprecations, have scrupled even to read them in the house of God.

As it may happen that similar scruples, founded on similarly mistaken notions, may cloud the mind and harass the devotions of some in this assembly, I am induced to offer a few observations on the subject. In the first place, then, I would remark, that when persons object to the awful de-

nunciations contained in these and similar passages of scripture, as though they betrayed a spirit of revenge and hatred, they either forget, or are ignorant of the source whence those denunciations proceed. They regard them, it is evident, as the spontaneous language of David, and not, as they are in truth, the language of the Holy Ghost. Nothing is more clearly revealed, nothing more positively asserted by the Apostle Paul than that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God," and that holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. And as this is asserted generally by St. Paul, so is it affirmed, particularly with reference to the passages quoted from the book of Psalms, by the Apostle Peter. For mark the emphatic expression which he employs in the opening words of this address to the assembled disciples, at the sixteenth verse of this chapter. "Men and brethren! this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost

by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas." Observe, then, the Holy Ghost is the speaker, whilst David's mouth and David's pen are the mere instruments of his utterance. This consideration should, of itself, suffice to satisfy us that the angry and vindictive passions of man are not here expressed, but the solemn determinations of him who seeth the end from the beginning, and who has declared that he will reward every one according to his work.

As a further proof that the parts of scripture thus ignorantly and improperly objected to should be regarded not as prayers, but as simple predictions, I would remark that it is agreeable to a well known idiom of the Hebrew language, sometimes to employ the imperative mood instead of the future tense. So common indeed is this, that we often find both kinds of expression used indiscriminately in the same prediction. Turn, for instance, to Psalm 28th. In the fourth verse

we thus read in the imperative strain: "Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavours: give them after the work of their hands: render to them their desert." In the very next verse the mood and tense are changed, and the judgment is predicted simply as a thing which shall hereafter happen. "Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up." This peculiarity in the Hebrew language of using the imperative mood instead of the future tense, is more observable in the writings of the Prophets, than in the historical parts of scripture, and it is perfectly natural that it should. The prophetic style is in itself, in several respects, very peculiar, and demands as much licence in its interpretation, as poetry when compared with prose. Sometimes we find the Prophets commanded to do a thing, when all that is intended by the Most High, is that they

should foretell that it will be done. Thus in Isaiah vi. 10, we find the Prophet thus addressed by Jehovah, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes : lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed," i. e. declare unto them that such things shall be the consequence of their evil conduct—they shall be overtaken with judicial blindness and hardness of heart. Sometimes we find them commanding others to do, what they intend only to reveal as about to be done. Thus in Isaiah xlvii. 1, the Prophet exclaims, "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground : " i.e. thou shalt come down—"thou shalt sit on the ground." Bearing, then, these two circumstances in mind—first, that the denunciations in question are the language not of man's vindictive wrath, but of the deliberate mind and purpose of the Most High concerning sin and sinners ; and

secondly, that it accords with the genius of the ancient Hebrew to express predictions of the future in an imperative form, and there is not one verse of any one chapter that needs produce the slightest scruple in our minds.

And now that I have entered on this important subject, I would further remark that the same idiom which appears in the Psalms, and in the writings of the Prophets, is sometimes perceived in the Epistles of St. Paul. We meet with a remarkable instance in 1 Corinthians xvi. 22, where the Apostle precedes the closing benediction of the Epistle, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you," with these solemn words: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha!" No one, it is presumed, will attribute to St. Paul, the man who of all others prayed and laboured and longed for the salvation of mankind—a wish that any should be accursed, or rejected of Christ. It were preposterous, to say the

least of it, to suppose that he who could testify that he had “great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart, for his kinsmen according to the flesh, and that his “heart’s desire and prayer for Israel was, that they should be saved,”—could, at the same time, wish all manner of evil to those unhappy individuals who loved not his Lord, but continued in unbelief. Nor is it wise, surely, to alter the phraseology which he has employed, to lead us to the persuasion that in uttering these awful words he was but predicting the future consequences of rejecting the Saviour, and pronouncing the doom which will most justly as well as most certainly befall the ungodly in the last great day. A similar interpretation, and that for similar reasons, should also be given to that very solemn declaration of his in 2 Timothy iv. 14, concerning an opposing persecutor and enemy to the truth. “Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil : the Lord reward him according to his works : of

whom be thou ware also ; for he hath greatly withstood our words.” If the Apostle wrote these words, as we profess to believe, under the inspiring influence and superintendence of the Holy Ghost, why should we suspect him for one moment, to be guilty of entertaining resentful or malicious feelings towards a fellow creature ? To suppose such a thing, would be supposing what is no less than a contradiction in terms. No ! St. Paul was a ruler in the Church—he was a divinely inspired Apostle—he was gifted with the discernment of spirits—he had authority to bind and to unloose—to excommunicate and to restore the backslider. Hence the propriety of such sentences, as, in the knowledge which he received from above, he pronounced from time to time upon offenders. How solemn and authoritative the language in which he pronounced the excommunication of the profane fornicator in the Corinthian Church :^d “ For I

^d 1 Corinthians v. 3—5.

verily as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed ; In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus.” And that these denunciations were not unauthorized ebullitions of feeling, much less resentful and malicious imprecations, is sufficiently proved by the fact that the divine power of the Most High bore testimony to their justice and their truth. Of this we have a striking instance in the 13th chapter of this history, where his visit to the Isle of Paphos and the consequent conversion of Sergius Paulus, the deputy, are briefly but beautifully told.

These instances, selected as well from the New as from the Old Testament, may suffice to illustrate a subject which is

frequently misunderstood, and shew the grievous impropriety of those who venture to attribute to the sacred writers feelings which they themselves would shudder to entertain.

And now let us return from this digression to a consideration of the remaining portion of the text.

St. Peter having produced his two striking quotations from the Book of Psalms, (the latter of which predicted that the bishopric vacated by the treachery and apostacy of Judas should be filled up by another individual,) proceeds to shew the character and qualifications which the office required. "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." In the first place, he was to be one of the persons then present—not only a pro-

fessed believer in Christ, but one proved to be such by boldly facing all the dangers to which such a profession exposed them at that moment, and by persevering in patient and devout supplication at a throne of grace. In the next place, he was to be an experienced Christian—not a “novice,” however zealous, or able, but one who had been a faithful and consistent disciple through the whole of his Saviour’s ministry; and thirdly, he was to be one who had been a companion of the Apostles themselves,—who had companied with them, and had heard what they heard, and had seen what they saw, from the very time when Jesus received the rite of Baptism at the hands of John the Baptist, until the memorable hour when he ascended up into heaven. Such were the qualifications which the vacant office required. Nor would any acquaintance with Jesus of Nazareth less intimate or less extensive suffice to fit a man to become associated with the eleven Apostles as a

witness of the stupendous miracles which he wrought—the gracious words which he uttered—the holy life which he led—the painful sufferings which he endured—the accursed death which he died—and above all, the glorious victory which he finally gained over all the powers of earth and hell, by bursting the barriers of the tomb, springing forth into life and immortality, and ascending in his risen and glorious manhood to the right hand of his Father.

And though, my brethren, qualifications precisely such as these are no longer necessary, and are, in their own nature, beyond the limits of possibility, yet still are there analogous qualifications which are as essentially necessary now, as they ever were, to the due discharge of the episcopal office. He that desires the office of a Bishop desireth “a good work”—a work emphatically, pre-eminently good! To fit a man for such an office, something far more important than the learning of the schools is required! He must know ex-

perimentally, the value and the power of Christ's salvation. He must have been taught well and deeply in the school of his divine Master. He must have followed the blessed steps of his most holy life through a longer period even, than the Apostles traversed Judea in company with their Lord. He must be able to take up their language and say, "I testify that which I have seen:" "that which I have seen and heard declare I unto you, and I know that my testimony is true." Having felt the power of the gospel on his own heart, he can speak of its influence to others. Having himself tasted that the Lord is gracious, he can confidently invite others to participate in his blessedness. Having learnt wisdom by experience, he can impart it to those who have none. Having studied the mind and will of God as revealed to him in his word, he can reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all meekness, tenderness, and authority.

In compliance with St. Peter's address

as to the necessity of fixing upon an individual qualified thus to be an Apostle in the place of Judas, two persons were selected who appeared to possess all the requisites which he had specified in an equal measure and degree. These were Joseph, called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. Not knowing which to prefer, and not being biased by any sinister motives, or foolish prejudices, or fond partialities—their harmony was not in the least degree disturbed, nor did they even put the question to the vote, but committed the matter in solemn prayer to the disposal of the Most High, beseeching him so to overrule the casting of a lot, that it might fall upon the more eligible individual. The substance at least, of the prayer which they offered up on the occasion, is given us in the words which follow : “ And they prayed and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen ; that he may take part of this mi-

nistry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place."

How appropriate the terms here employed in addressing the Most High! "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men!" They felt that they could read only the language of the life; and that whilst the qualifications of these distinguished men were in all discernible respects equal, there might be some hidden fitness in the one, superior to that of the other, which the eye of Omniscience alone could perceive. And perhaps the incident recorded in 1 Samuel xvi., and which occurred at the appointment of one of the sons of Jesse to be the future King of Israel, might at this time have been present to their minds. "And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse, the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me

a king among his sons. And it came to pass when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him. But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature ; because I have refused him ; for the Lord seeth not as man seeth ; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Yes, brethren ; and as it is his prerogative alone to discern the hearts of the children of men, so is it our duty and interest to appeal to him continually in this character, and beseech him to enable us in all our connections in life—in all our friendships—and in all our alliances, to select such persons as he is pleased to approve and prefer. And if this be the duty of all, how specially is it the duty of the inexperienced and the young ! Alas ! the mistakes which for lack of thus appealing unto God in prayer are sometimes committed, even by piously disposed persons !

Instead of beseeching the Searcher of hearts to discover to them the fitness of individuals who seek to be their partners in business, or their companions for life, they are contented to be guided solely by their own prepossessions, their own fancy, and their own taste. And what are frequently the wretched results, but disappointment, disquietude, misery, and unavailing regret!

But to return to the Apostles. Having thus solemnly committed the solution of their difficulty to Him who had promised to hear the supplications of faith, they calmly and confidently awaited the result. "And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven Apostles."

On the subject of lots much might be said, had we time to enter upon it. Many instances occur in scripture in which they were not only used, but commanded to be used. Thus lots were directed to be cast on the two goats, offered for the sins of

Israel on the great day of atonement, in order to ascertain which of the two should be sacrificed, and which set at liberty. In a similar manner he appointed that the land of promise should be divided by lot. The cities also which were assigned to the Priests and Levites were given to them by lot. And so also in the time of David the twenty-four classes of the Priests and Levites had their times of waiting at the temple distributed to them by lot.

As to the mode of casting lots we can gather but very little information from scripture, and commentators are by no means agreed in their opinions. It is probable that several methods were used—one of which appears to be indistinctly pointed out to us in Proverbs. “The lot is cast into the lap: but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”

But though we may have precedents sufficient in scripture to justify the use of lots in certain peculiar cases, where a solemn appeal may justly and confidently

be made to the omniscient God, preceded by devout supplication and prayer—yet, under ordinary circumstances, where there is no such necessity, where the occasion is light and trifling, where one side of the alternative is questionable, or where superstition in any degree prevails, the practice is not only unwarranted, but absolutely sinful. So much indeed has the use of lots been abused by those who have resorted to them, that the Christian community with few exceptions have long ago laid them aside : and certainly our safety seems to lie in their neglect, rather than in their use.

That there was a very peculiar reason for thus appealing to God in the case of this appointment to the vacant Apostleship, will be obvious to every one, when he reflects, that the Apostles were not like ordinary pastors and teachers appointed by men having authority in the Church, and ordained by the imposition of hands, but were appointed in a special and extra-

ordinary manner by Christ himself. It was his immediate hand, (as it were,) and his alone, that set them apart, and rested upon them always.

Of the subsequent history of the newly-elected Apostle we know little ; but though neither his labours, nor those of some of his brethren are mentioned in the brief annals of St. Luke, we have every reason to believe that they were extensively useful in the spheres which they severally occupied in the providence of God. When the lot had fallen upon Matthias, it is said that he was numbered with the eleven Apostles, which expresses perhaps the true meaning of the previous sentence, “that he might go to his own place.” Most commentators, however, suppose that whilst the one refers to Matthias, the other as plainly refers to Judas—that, in short, the traitor was to go to his own proper place of misery in the invisible world, and not that another was to be appointed to inherit the place which he had forfeited

among the Apostles. The question, however, is of little or no moment; and it becomes us rather, in conclusion, to draw from the whole subject one or two practical reflections.

In the first place, I would remark, that however grievous it is to think that unworthy and even wicked men are sometimes elevated to places of authority and distinction in the Church, yet the fact itself affords no just ground either to question the fidelity of God to his promises, or to think lightly of the claims of a regularly appointed priesthood. Whilst Judas was numbered with the twelve he was as legitimately a minister of Christ as Peter, or James, or John. During the whole of his official existence he was an ungodly man, and yet a real Apostle; nor were any of his apostolic acts vitiated by his personal demerit. The objection therefore is altogether futile which we sometimes hear urged against the importance of apostolic succession, and the administra-

tion of the sacraments, by regularly appointed Pastors, viz., that no spiritual benefit, no ministerial authority can possibly arise from the imposition of the hands of worldly or mercenary prelates. Who more worldly—who more mercenary than the Apostle Judas? yet were his ministrations valid when he did what he was commanded in the name of his ill-requited Master—whether he proclaimed his coming kingdom, or healed the sick, or gave sight to the blind. The sentiments of the venerable Reformers of our Church on this point are well expressed in her 26th Article.*

* Although in the visible Church the evil be ever mingled with the good, and sometime the evil have chief authority in the ministration of the Word and Sacraments: yet forasmuch as they do not the same in their own name, but in Christ's, and do minister by his commission and authority, we may use their ministry, both in hearing the Word of God, and in receiving of the Sacraments. Neither is the effect of Christ's ordinance taken away by their wickedness, nor the grace of God's gifts diminished from such as by faith and rightly do receive the Sacraments ministered unto them, which be effectual, because of Christ's institution and promise, although they be ministered by evil men.

Nevertheless it appertaineth to the discipline of the

Whilst firmly maintaining that we may derive benefit from the ministrations of God's ordinances, even at the hands of ungodly pastors, they forcibly point out to us, at the same time, the importance of bringing all such Christians to the bar of ecclesiastical judgment, and of deposing them, like Judas, from the Ministry. And well would it be for the purity of the Church, and the spread of true religion amongst us, if instead of retailing scandal concerning some of the clergy, who dishonour their office, and their Saviour, we took serious steps to promote their reformation ; or, if that be hopeless, to represent their misconduct to those who, having succeeded the Apostles, in the government of the Church—have still power to bind and to unloose—to depose from the Ministry, no less than to excommunicate from the Church. Above all we should repre-

Church, that enquiry be made of evil ministers, and that they be accused by those that have knowledge of their offences : and finally being found guilty, by just judgment be deposed.

sent their sad case to the chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls, and beseech him to pardon their transgressions, and renew their hearts, lest in the abuse of their ministry, and the destruction of the souls committed to their charge, they should be “treasuring up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”^f

^f Romans ii. 5.

LECTURE IV.

ACTS ii. 22, 23.

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God, among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

THOUGH it is the duty of a Christian to bear contumely with meekness, and not to feel too keenly the false and injurious imputations of his slanderers, yet there are occasions when he is called upon to defend his character, and to disprove the charges whether wantonly or maliciously brought against him. This is particularly the case when the cause of religion is likely to

suffer from the propagation of the calumny, and when the honour of God and the Saviour is ultimately and intimately concerned. The truth of this remark is practically and forcibly illustrated in the case of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, when the supernatural and divine influence under which they spake in divers languages of the wonderful works of God was blasphemously attributed by some persons to intoxication. St. Peter, as the spokesman of the rest, at once refuted the calumny by addressing them calmly and deliberately in a language familiar to them all, and pointing out the absurdity of supposing that persons frequenting as they did the sacred ordinances of the Temple, and occupied as they were with grave and serious pursuits, should be so lost to all the restraints of decency as to become inebriated at that early hour of the day. And further to vindicate the character of the miracle, and to give a satisfactory reply to the inquiry

which was reiterated by the more rational and serious part of their audience, "What meaneth this?" he tells them that what they had then witnessed was nothing less than a fulfilment of a remarkable prediction by the prophet Joel, that in the last days it should come to pass that God would "pour out of his spirit upon all flesh."

But the Apostle was influenced by a desire not only to vindicate his own character and that of his brethren, and to justify the miracle as the fulfilment of ancient prophecy, but also to benefit the souls of his calumniators; and he therefore proceeds to preach unto them Jesus and the resurrection—to shew them their guilt in rejecting his claims and putting him to death—and to assure them that having been raised from the dead and elevated to the right hand of the Father, he had poured forth upon them the promised influences of the Holy Ghost.

And in this, brethren, we have a beautiful instance of the power of divine

grace in subduing the natural workings of the human heart, and causing resentment to give place to compassion and love. When the children of this world rise up to vindicate their reputation, what animosity is generally shewn towards those who have aspersed their characters ! What hatred—what ill-will—what imprecations of evil ! The outward exhibition of these vindictive passions doubtless varies with the circumstances and condition of mankind ; but the “animus,” the inward feeling, is essentially the same, whether it leads to the exercise of brute force in the lower orders of society, or to the adoption of duelling in the higher.

And even where neither of these methods is resorted to, how ferocious is the spirit which is frequently displayed in the more silent and refined use of the pen ! Oh, the bitterness of that gall with which it transcribes and circulates the genuine language of the heart ! Look at the periodicals of the day—peruse our daily and

weekly newspapers—our magazines, our pamphlets, and our reviews, and say if the instances are either few or trivial in which men who profess and call themselves Christians, attempt to vindicate not only their character, but their opinions, their interests, their prepossessions, their party, at the expense of all the charities of life? What contempt do they take pains to manifest towards their opponents—what malicious insinuations do they throw out!

To such an awful and disgraceful length are these things carried in the present day that we may well tremble for the state of society, and for the prospects of the rising generation. That they form a large item in the national guilt of this kingdom I am well persuaded—nor can we doubt that they justly expose us to the displeasure of the Almighty.

But however fiercely the children of this world may war with each other under the pretence of vindicating their character, let not the Christian be contaminated by

their example. Never let him forget that it is as much his duty to strive to benefit his calumniator as to refute the calumny. He is commanded by the Master whom he professes to serve, to “love his enemies—to bless them that persecute him—to do good unto them that hate him—and to pray for them which despitefully use him and persecute him.” He may expose the absurdity of the charges brought against him—he may even charge his blasphemer with the wickedness of his doings ; but he must do so, not for the gratification of his own malice or resentment, but with a view to convince him of sin, and to bring him to the exercise of penitence and faith.

This is precisely the course adopted by the Apostle Peter in the instance before us. He speaks to his hearers of the terrible crime which they had committed in crucifying the Lord of glory ; but not with a view to annoy them with reproaches, much less with a view to gratify any evil passions on his part. Oh, no ! His desire

was to bring them to that state of mind which they subsequently exemplified when they confessed their iniquity with the deepest self-abasement, and earnestly inquired what they should do to be saved.

The terms which he employed in speaking of his divine Master were wisely chosen to meet the limited extent of their knowledge of his claims. He first speaks of him only as a man whom they all knew to have been most extraordinarily gifted of God,—and then proceeds by degrees to declare the sublime fact that he was constituted both the long expected Messiah of their nation, and the lord of the whole earth. “Ye men of Israel!” he exclaims, “hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.” In this simple, yet impressive manner, does he introduce the Saviour to their notice. Had he spoken of him at once as the “Lord of

life and glory," they would probably have failed to understand his meaning, or they might have disputed the validity of the title. He therefore speaks of him in terms which they could neither gainsay nor misunderstand. The name of Jesus of Nazareth was familiar to all ; even little children had become acquainted with it, and loved to lisp it with their infant voices. The opinions of men respecting him were doubtless various, and that he had many bitter enemies even among the learned and leading men of their nation was sufficiently obvious. But one thing they could not deny, that his character and pretensions received many supernatural and miraculous attestations from heaven. Miracles, and wonders, and signs had been performed by him in their presence ; and not only so but he appealed to these as evidences of his divine mission. For a period of at least three or four years they had been eye-witnesses of these attestations ; for he had performed his wondrous

works not secretly, in a corner, but openly, and in the midst of admiring multitudes. Nor were they few in number, and similar in kind, but multiplied and various.

St. Peter lays so much stress upon our Lord's miracles as a divine attestation to his claims, that it may be well to pause for a few moments to contemplate their nature and importance. Many phenomena, many strange and astonishing things happen from day to day in the world, which are not, properly speaking, miracles. A miracle is a suspension or counteraction of what are termed the laws of nature, or, in the language of scripture, "the ordinances of heaven." And that our Saviour's wondrous works partook of such a character, will be evident to every reader of the New Testament. Take, for instance, any one of the instantaneous cures which he wrought. His giving immediate sight to the blind—hearing to the deaf—speech to the dumb—agility to the lame, and strength

to the withered arm. How different is it from every modern pretension of supernatural powers—where excitement is made to bear, like an electric shock, upon a weak or nervous temperament, and rouse to active exertion some valetudinarian whose debility had long confined him to his couch. The cure, such as it is, for it is generally only temporary in its duration, may astonish beholders, and be ignorantly regarded as a miracle : but there is nothing in it supernatural : it may all be accounted for on well-known principles. But there are no discoverable principles on which a man born blind can, without a surgical operation, be made to see. No excitement—no powerful impression on the nerves, could make the withered arm to appear, in a moment, fleshy and robust. The voice or the touch that could achieve such cures must indeed be divine. And so also in his cure of leprosy, the “finger of God” was most plainly visible. Without inquiring whether this disorder as it then

existed, was incurable by medical treatment, or not, it is obvious that nothing short of supernatural power could work an instantaneous cure—healing in a moment every loathsome ulcer, and investing every feature and member of the body with the bloom, and freshness, and vigour of health.

But wonders greater (if it be possible) even than these, were wrought by Jesus of Nazareth, to prove that he came from God. Behold him, on one occasion, walking upon the water in the lake of Genesareth when its waves were fiercely tossing with the wind. It were absurd to attempt to account for such a miracle on natural principles. On natural principles it were utterly impossible. And methinks the winds which immediately hushed themselves into silence and submission when Jesus entered into the ship on that occasion spake a lesson of reproof to the sceptical philosophers of that, and every age, and called upon all men to do homage to the Son of God. Well might his disciples

marvel, when, on another occasion, he arose, and rebuked the raging winds, and the agitated sea which threatened every moment to overwhelm them in its waters, saying, "Peace, be still!" and there was a great calm! And well might they exclaim, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

Take again another instance of the influence which he exerted on inert and insensible matter, in the multiplication of food for the supply of multitudes who thronged to hear him in a desert place. Behold him feeding, on one occasion, four, and on another five thousand men, besides women and children, with a few loaves of barley bread, and a few little fishes. Here, it must surely be admitted, we see the exertion of creative power, accompanied by evidence so palpable and so multiplied that nothing but the perverseness of determined scepticism can either gainsay or resist it.

The appeal of St. Peter, in the text,

to the multitude which then surrounded him, is such as no impostor would ever have dared to make. It was within fifty days after the public execution of Jesus of Nazareth that this appeal was made. Could he have made it, if it were not notorious that he had wrought during his life-time many marvellous works? No man in his senses would have stood up as he did, and after speaking of certain "miracles, and signs, and wonders," add the emphatic remark, "as ye yourselves also know,"—if it were not a fact which they could not possibly deny. Otherwise the charge of intoxication would soon have been exchanged for the well-merited accusation of hypocrisy, effrontery, deceit, and fraud. "We know no such things," would have been the indignant reply from ten thousand lips. "He may have deceived the people of Nazareth for aught we know, but he has never achieved anything remarkable here, whereas you say that he performed miracles in the midst of us, of

which we are all conscious. What miracles did he perform? We know of none." Such would have been the reply of the multitude to St. Peter's appeal were it not as notorious as noon-day that the things which he asserted were true.

But you take for granted, replies the sceptic, that the account given you of this appeal in the Acts of the Apostles is true. Suppose I call in question the fact that St. Peter ever made this appeal. Suppose I demand a proof of the veracity of the historian? We ask then again, would any one professing to write a history such as that of the Acts of the Apostles at so early a period after that in which they are declared to have occurred, venture to state time and place and particular circumstances, as in the instance before us, if the testimony were false. The date of this book is clearly defined to be not later than the year 64, i.e. about thirty years subsequent to the events which are here professed to be recorded. How mad, then,

and absurd, not to say how wicked, would have been the attempt to impose such a story as that which we have been considering, upon the credulity of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, if it were otherwise than correct? What method could in that case have been adopted better fitted to prejudice the whole population against a religion which sought to give currency to such a barefaced and infamous falsehood? Here we have not only a statement of a marvellous fact,—the miraculous outpouring of supernatural influence, but the date is given with the greatest precision, and the numbers who are said to have witnessed the effects were many thousands. Not only the year, but the very day of the year is given; and it is added in the sequel of the narrative that three thousand persons were converted on that occasion to the faith. Now suppose such a statement were now made as having occurred in the neighbourhood of St. Paul's, or of the Royal Exchange, in London, on a certain

day and hour, (for the very hour is here given, viz. nine o'clock in the morning,) some twenty-nine or thirty years ago. Is it not certain that the fraud would at once be denounced, and that the religion which it was intended to serve would be exposed to well-deserved and universal execration? Would not hundreds and thousands be ready to testify that nothing of the kind had occurred—that they were then living in the neighbourhood of St. Paul's or of the Royal Exchange, or were in the habit of frequenting it, and that had anything so extraordinary, so marvellous, so supernatural, occurred in the manner described, they could not have failed to become acquainted with it, and to treasure it up in their memories?

No candid inquirer can pursue this train of reasoning without clearly perceiving, first that St. Luke would not have ventured to relate the circumstances of this transaction, in the particular manner which he has done, unless the gift of

tongues had really been bestowed, and unless St. Peter had really made this appeal to the multitude: and secondly, that St. Peter himself would not have dared to make that appeal unless it were notoriously and undeniably true that Jesus had wrought miracles, and signs, and wonders among the people.

Seeing then, my brethren, the satisfactory evidence which is afforded us respecting the facts of our Saviour's miracles, we may well rejoice to believe with the Apostle that thereby he was manifestly approved of God. They are to be regarded not merely as tokens of his power and his mercy, (for they were inconceivably grand and unspeakably benevolent in their character) but more especially as proofs of the divinity of his mission. He hereby proved that he came from God, and that his claim to be the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world, was just and true. They were such miracles as God alone could perform, and he performed

them by Jesus of Nazareth at the moment when he asserted that God was his Father. Hereby therefore he was declared to be the Son of God with power, and was “approved of God.”

But, alas ! a brief consideration of the concluding words of the text will shew us that, so far from being approved of men, he was rejected and persecuted, and put to death ; for such is the heavy crime which the Apostle Peter proceeds to charge the multitude with. “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”

The crime had been great, had Jesus borne no other character than that of an innocent man, or had he been no greater in dignity than an ordinary prophet. But what tongue can express the guilt, what mind can conceive the enormity of the offence involved in the ungrateful, and cruel, and unprovoked crucifixion of him, who came professedly to seek and to save

that which was lost—who went about doing good—and to the validity of whose claims to be heard, and loved, and obeyed by all men, God bare witness by signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds! Well might the rocks rend asunder with alarm, as the tidings rolled over them that the people whom he came to redeem had put him to an ignominious death! Well might the sun array himself in mourning, and hide his glories for a season, from offending man! All nature might well be vocal on witnessing a catastrophe such as this, and cry aloud in accents of horror and amazement! Oh! it was a crime which angels must have wept to behold, and which nothing but boundless compassion and infinite mercy could possibly forgive.

Yes! it was indeed, and emphatically, with “wicked hands,” that they seized, and bound, and crucified, and slew him. What though the instrumentality of the Roman soldiers was employed to execute the sentence—the sentence itself was

theirs, and so was the primary and super-eminent guilt. Theirs were the hands that were lifted up in murderous indignation, whilst they cried aloud, "Crucify him, crucify him," and demanded that Barabbas should be released unto them; and theirs also the hands which accorded with the self-awarded curse, "His blood be on us, and on our children!"

Was, then, the purpose of the Most High frustrated by the malice and the rage of earth and hell? Did it appear, after all, that he, who had been approved of God by such marvellous works, was unable to resist the stratagems and the might of his puny foes? Oh no! Far otherwise was the case. Strange, and mysterious, and wonderful as it may appear, the fore-ordained purposes of Jehovah were hereby fulfilled. "Him being delivered," says St. Peter, "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have crucified and slain." Had it not been so, in vain would have proved

the subtlety and the prowess of a world in arms. "Put up again thy sword into his place," exclaims the Saviour when Peter was beginning to avenge his wrongs, and to attempt his deliverance from the officers who had apprehended him: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" And when he stood also before Pilate in the judgment-hall, we find him again distinctly recognizing the divine purpose of his Father. "Speakest thou not unto me?" asks the astonished governor, "knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." So deeply were the minds of the early Christians impressed with the idea that it was God's predestined purpose that Jesus should be persecuted

and slain by the very persons who compassed his death, that they did not scruple to advert to it plainly and forcibly in their prayers. Thus in Acts iv. 24, when St. Peter and St. John related to their own company all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, "Of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."

But so far was this divine purpose from justifying, that it did not in the least degree extenuate their guilt. In persecuting Jesus, they followed no other bias than that of their own depraved minds. The determination of Jehovah influenced not their determination; for we are expressly told in the language of inspiration, that no man should "say when he is

tempted, ‘I am tempted of God :’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” There is much that is mysterious in the co-existence of man’s free-agency, and God’s pre-ordaining and overruling will. We see them both purposing the same thing—the one righteously, the other wickedly—the one from motives of benevolence, the other from considerations, perhaps, of self-gratification or resentment. The object of the unbelieving Jews in crucifying the Saviour was to indulge their own evil passions and desires—that of the Most High was to glorify his justice, his mercy, and his truth, and to save a multitude of transgressors.

Learn, then, my brethren, from this subject, to attribute your salvation to the determinate purpose of God’s mercy and grace,—and your destruction to the perverseness of your own will. It was not because mankind deserved an atoning Saviour to be offered in their stead—much

less because they planned and executed it, that Jesus came into the world to give his life a ransom for many. It was because he was rich in mercy and boundless in compassion. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

But the destruction of mankind, on the other hand, is not the result of divine purpose and contrivance, as some would strangely affirm, but the consequence of human perverseness. "O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself," is the unerring testimony of Scripture concerning us. "Oh, why will ye die, O house of Israel," is the tender expostulation of him against whom we have rebelled, and "as I live," saith the Lord, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn from his wicked ways, and live."

LECTURE V.

ACTS iii. 1—16.

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple, at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple, which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.

Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms.

And Peter fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us.

And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up; and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength.

And he leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered

with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

And all the people saw him walking and praising God.

And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

And as the lame man which was healed, held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers hath glorified his son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.

But ye denied the holy One, and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you,

And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him, hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

ONE of the immediate results of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the day of

Pentecost was, as we have already seen, the performance of multiplied miracles by the first heralds of salvation. “Many signs and wonders,” it is said, “were done by the Apostles.”

But as in the narratives of the Evangelists a few only of our Lord’s miracles are recorded, as specimens of the whole, so is it in the history which is afforded us in this book of the supernatural acts of the Apostles,—we are not furnished with more than an instance here and there of all the wonders which they wrought.

One of those instances, and the first on record, is that which now invites our attention—the healing of a man lame from his birth. The reason why this, rather than any other of the miracles performed the same day is noticed by the historian, is obvious, when we read the sequel of the narrative, and trace the consequences to which it gave rise. Nor is it possible to peruse the account without being struck with the simplicity with which it is told.

No laboured expressions are sought out, no ostentatious language used, no exaggeration indulged in: all is quietly and simply stated as matters of fact, which were too notorious to be gainsayed or denied. And truly this thing “was not done in a corner.” It was performed publicly—in a public place—and on a public occasion. Both the hour at which the miracle was wrought, and the precise spot, are particularly recorded. The hour was well known to the Jews as the hour of evening prayer, corresponding with our hour of three in the afternoon. They called it the ninth hour, beginning their reckoning at six o’clock in the morning, and not as we do, at midnight.

“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.”

The Apostles were in the habit, it would seem, of attending the public devotions of the Temple both morning and evening; but whether in a body, or sepa-

rately, we are not informed. On this occasion, however, Peter and John went up apart from their brethren. Perhaps they had just been employed together in preaching the glad tidings of salvation, and having laboured together in the work of teaching and exhortation they were now hastening to the house where their fathers and their father's fathers had worshipped, to pray and supplicate together. Nor is it difficult to imagine with what joy and gladness of heart they would commune with each other on the way concerning all the wonders of that Redeemer which it was their high privilege to proclaim. How would their hearts burn within them whilst they thus walked to the house of God as friends, and spake to one another of their common Lord? How would they remind each other of the occasions on which they followed him through the streets which they were then traversing, and heard him utter the gracious words which fell from his lips. And when

they drew nigh to the Temple, what solemn reflections would steal over their minds connected with their Master's awful predictions respecting its overthrow ! Many profitable remarks, and many silent but not less profitable reflections would doubtless be indulged in as they wended their way together to the courts of the sanctuary. And well would it be, if, when Christian friends accompanied each other to the house of God, they would always bear in mind the character of that conversation which is alone comely and befitting the occasion. How many idle words, and frivolous and worldly remarks, are allowed to dissipate the mind, and unfit the heart for communion with the living God. Guard against such intruders upon the preparedness which you should seek to obtain for your devotional exercises. And remember that there is not only a present benefit to be realised from pious conversation, but a future reward. For what saith the prophet ? "Then they that feared the

Lord spake often one to another : and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels ; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”^g

But whatever was the character of the Apostles’ conversation, or of the thoughts which then occupied their minds, their attention was ere long diverted by a case of distress which demanded their sympathy and assistance. “ A certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the Temple, which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the Temple ; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the Temple, asked an alms.”

The lameness with which this poor cripple was afflicted was evidently incurable by human ingenuity or skill. He

^g Malachi iii. 16.

was, therefore, a fit subject for the display of that supernatural power with which the Apostles were endowed by their master, in testimony of the truth of their mission. The place at which he was accustomed to be laid was a particular gate of the temple, here termed the “Beautiful”—an epithet which, according to the historian Josephus, it richly deserved, for it surpassed every other gate in the splendour of its appearance, and the richness of its materials. Its erection is attributed to Herod the Great, and was costly in the extreme, being of vast dimensions, and consisting entirely of Corinthian brass.

It does not appear that the persons of the Apostles were at all known to the lame man, or that he expected anything extraordinary from them. It would seem, on the contrary, that, regarding them as men of an humbler rank in life, he did not ask for their assistance with that earnest importunity which he would doubtless have urged towards the wealthier passers by.

Indeed he scarcely looked at them when he asked them for their alms, repeating probably his request by anticipation to some other persons who were entering in at the same time. For “Peter, (we are told) fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us;” i.e. Give us your attention. He did so; his expectations were immediately awakened. “He gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.”

It was not in vain that he gave heed, though a far different boon awaited him from that which he had dared to imagine. The first words indeed which fell from the Apostle’s lips must have damped his expectations: “Silver and gold,” exclaims St. Peter, “have I none.” “Then it is only your pity that you can give me,” was perhaps the silent reply of the poor cripple—“yet even your sympathy is acceptable, and I thank you for it.” But what must have been his reflections—what his feelings—when he heard the remaining

portion of the sentence ; “but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Rise up and walk.” Scarcely had he time to call to mind the wonderful things which he had heard of this Jesus, or to inquire what influence his name could have upon his pitiable condition—scarcely had he leisure to reflect for a moment upon the meaning of this singular address, than the promised cure is effected. “And Peter took him by the right hand, and lifted him up ; and immediately his feet and ancle bones received strength. And he leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the Temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.” Conceive, brethren, if you can, the sensations of the poor man at this moment. From his birth to that very hour—for a period in short of forty years, he had never set his foot to the ground. He was carried to and fro every day as a helpless cripple. In a moment he is enabled to stand—to walk—to leap—to

run. Think of the extacy of delight with which he would perform these several functions !

And what a reproof does the reflection yield to some of us who are accustomed perhaps to employ our several faculties of body and mind without let or hindrance day after day, and year after year, and think lightly of the privilege. Were He “in whom we live and move, and have our being,” to put forth his hand in righteous discipline, and to deprive us of any one of their number, how sensible should we suddenly become of its value ! Oh let us be stimulated to the exercise of daily thankfulness to Almighty God, and to a diligent endeavour to glorify him in our bodies and in our spirits which are his. Let us seek to consecrate every faculty to his service ! Let us make a covenant with our eyes that we will not look upon iniquity—with our tongues that they shall speak only to edification—with our hands that they shall be diligent only in good

works—and with our feet that they shall bear us willingly to no scene nor situation in which we would not that God's eye should behold us !

In the instance before us, the first place to which the feet and ankle bones which had been miraculously strengthened bore their grateful possessor, was the Temple. Thither he accompanied his benefactors with feelings more easy to be conceived than described. And if, in the extacy of his joy, he could not contain himself, but poured forth his praises unto God in his progress through the outer courts of the building—with what deep emotions must he have offered up his thanksgivings when, arriving at the proper place, he joined in the solemnities of the temple-service !

Dear brethren ! you have all participated largely of the divine mercy. Many signal deliverances—many gracious restorations to health or prosperity, some of you have from time to time experienced. Whither do your feet most cheerfully

bear you on such occasions? Is it to scenes of gaiety and dissipation—scenes of traffic—scenes of worldly bustle—your shop, your counting-house—the market or the exchange? Or is it to the sanctuary of the Lord? Do you long, on such occasions, to unite with the great congregation in lauding and praising God's holy name? Is your desire that which David expresses when he says: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" And in the anticipation of such returning privileges can you heartily join the sweet singer of Israel, and say: "O send out thy light and thy truth! Let them lead me! Let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy?"

I speak the happy experience of some, I doubt not, in this assembly; and as face

answereth to face in the polished mirror, so do their sentiments, and feelings, and joys accord with those which I have advanced. Happy they who can gather from the prevalence of such spiritual and heavenly desires a sure and certain hope that they are journeying to the Temple which is above—to that sanctuary whence “they shall go no more out,” and where they shall spend an everlasting series of “ages of ages” in ascribing glory, and worship, and honour to Him who sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever.

The publicity which was given to this miraculous cure was extensive and immediate. It could not, in fact, be otherwise, for “all the people,” we are told, “saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.” And not only did the people then on the spot witness the circumstance, but vast multi-

tudes out of the more immediate neighbourhood, attracted by the noise, followed the interesting group to one of the porches of the temple, where they beheld the well-known individual who had been healed, and the Apostles, who had been the instruments of his cure, forcibly detained by his fond and grateful embrace. “And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering.” At one moment they would gaze with astonishment upon the poor man whom they had so often pitied for his infirmities, now leaping with strength and agility : at another they would look with awe and admiration upon the Apostles to whom he fondly clung, and to whose miraculous interposition he ascribed his cure.

The effect produced upon the minds of the surrounding multitude was sufficiently evident to the Apostles ; and had they any but the purest motives in their bosoms

—had pride, or ambition, or any selfish feeling been their ruling passion, what an advantage might they have now taken of the people's admiration to further their ends! But no! jealous of their Master's honour, they anticipated the general applause by promptly ascribing the power and the merit to whom alone they were due, and declaring to them, in language too plain to be misunderstood, that the author of the miracle was no other than the Messiah whom they had so recently rejected and crucified. For thus we read in the twelfth and four following verses: "And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was deter-

mined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."

What a striking exhibition, my brethren, have we here of the self-renunciation of the Apostles—their fidelity to their Master—the ardour with which they vindicated his claims—and the boldness with which they brought home to the consciences of their hearers a crime of unparalleled enormity! They disclaim "in limine," at the very threshold of their address, the vain supposition that either by their own power, or sanctity, or superior merit, the miracle had been performed. It was the "finger of God" that

had wrought this wondrous cure—and the end for which it was accomplished was to glorify his Son Jesus !

‘What ! the teacher from Nazareth—the Galilean so lately mocked, insulted, lacerated with stripes, spit upon, crucified?’ ‘Yes ; that very Jesus whom ye delivered up with unrelenting malice to all the horrors of an ignominious death ! Pilate, though a heathen, was reluctant to execute him, and plainly told you that he deemed him guiltless. But what was your reply, “Away with him, crucify him, crucify him.” And then, when he reminded you of your privilege at that season to claim the release of some one prisoner, and proposed that it should be Jesus, what was the cry which reverberated throughout the palace, “Not this man, but Barabbas.” Ye “desired a murderer to be granted you, and killed the Prince of life.” But though persecuted and put to death by man, he was speedily rescued from the grave by the omnipotent power of his

Father, and glorified by the mighty signs which they his Apostles were commissioned to display. We are witnesses of his resurrection, and we refer to the miracle which has just been wrought in his name as a proof that our testimony is true. It was in his name, and in his only, that we performed this cure. You yourselves can bear us witness that when we took the hand of the poor cripple and lifted him up, our language was this, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk." That is the name—that is the power, which has accomplished this supernatural work. "His name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."

The faith here spoken of is thought by some commentators to be that of the lame man when he gave heed unto the Apostles expecting to receive something from them. By others, however, and that with greater

probability, it is interpreted to be the faith of the Apostles. At all events the miracle was wrought by the Most High in accordance with a justified expectation that he would thus honour the name of his beloved Son. Doubtless the faith which had been exercised, as well as the cure which had been wrought, was God's supernatural gift. It was not at all times, nor after their own private fancy or inclination, that the Apostles wrought miracles. When a sign or a wonder was to be given, the same power which was at hand to bestow it, was at hand also to produce faith in the mind of the instrument.

But let us see, brethren, if we cannot gather one or two practical remarks from the subject, before I draw my sermon to a close.

'The age of miracles,' it is said, 'is passed.' True, if the remark be restricted to miracles such as we have now been contemplating. But are there not miracles in grace, as well as in nature? Have they

not a reference to mind, as well as to matter?—to the immortal soul, as well as to the corruptible body? Yes! and such miracles are by no means rare. Every true Christian is a miracle. He is the workmanship of God, created in good works. “If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things have passed away, and all things have become new.” When the faithful minister of Christ addresses his people successfully in the name of his divine Master—when his arguments prevail with the careless sinner to rouse him to inquiry, and his exhortations to flee unto the sanctuary of the Saviour’s cross are promptly obeyed—when the heart thus smitten with remorse is cleansed and healed and pacified by a believing application of the blood of Jesus, and the affections and desires of the soul are elevated to heaven, a miracle has been achieved greater in might and far greater in importance than that which we have just been contemplating.

But let not the instrument be unduly praised. Well indeed may men be filled with wonder and amazement at the change which is thus wrought ; but let them not look so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had turned them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. It is the unmerited work of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He glorifies his son Jesus in the salvation of our hearers. In his name, and through faith in his name, they are converted, justified, sanctified, and saved—and to his all glorious name, and to his alone, be all the praise ascribed by minister and people. It is not surprising indeed that the young convert should cling with fond affection to the instrument of his conversion, as did the lame man that was healed to Peter and John. But let him not thank or praise him in too flattering terms ; much less let him detain him an unnecessary moment from the house and work of his God. He

has other sheep to seek and to rescue out of this naughty world, and his time must not be monopolised by those whom he has already restored to the fold.

In the last place I would remark, that though the age of miracles is passed, the age of usefulness and benevolence still continues. How many are there, who, through the bounty of God's providence, have it in their power to be liberal in his cause, and to do good in a private capacity to a very large extent. Reversing the language of the apostle Peter, they can say to the sick, the necessitous, the afflicted, "Miraculous powers have I none, but such as I have, whether of silver or gold, give I unto thee. Take of my substance to supply your wants, and give God the glory."

Nor is it only with reference to the body that such liberality may be shewn. There are spiritual necessities also, which the private Christian may do much to supply. Ministerial authority he has none

—but he may bring, possibly, his erring brother to the sphere in which it exists. He cannot preach in public—but he can persuade in private. He can aid in the erection of churches—in the establishment of schools—in the circulation of the Scriptures—in the visitation of the sick, the helpless, and the needy. Of whatever he has, whether of influence, or time, or activity, or money, he can freely give in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, through faith in his name, and confidently expect the promised blessing on the giver and the gift.

LECTURE VI.

ACTS iv. 13—22.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled, and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,

Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them, is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.

But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus.

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

For we cannot but speak, the things which we have seen and heard.

So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.

For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

WE now find the Apostles Peter and John standing before the ecclesiastical tribunal at Jerusalem, where they had been placed by the malice of their enemies. Their reply to the question, "By what power, or by what name have ye done this?" was a reply worthy of the occasion—worthy of the Master whom they served, and of the cause which they advocated. They spake with such calm dignity—with such chastised fervour—with such holy and undaunted courage, as nothing but the inspiring influences of divine grace can produce.

Nor was the effect trifling or insignificant upon the minds of the council. They were awe-struck and astonished.

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled.”

It is admitted, I believe, by all who are competent to decide upon the subject, that the word here rendered “ignorant,” more properly signifies “obscure,” or “private,”—and that by so rendering it, we not only avoid a tautology of expression, but escape from the danger of associating any false conceptions with a want of learning on the part of the Apostles. In all divine and supernatural knowledge they were preeminently great: but in the acquisitions of science—in the attainments of the scholar in the erudition of the Jewish scribes and rabbis—they were confessedly and avowedly deficient. Nay, it is the glory of our religion that they were so; and it furnishes one of the many proofs which their history affords us that the progress of Christianity was the result, not of human ability, learning,

or contrivance, but of the mighty power of God. To this remarkable circumstance we find St. Paul, the most learned of all the inspired Apostles, frequently advert-
ing. Writing to the Corinthians, he says, in the first chapter of his first epistle, verse 26—29, “Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.” And then, in the next chapter, he proceeds still further. “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to

know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified: and I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling: and my speech, and my preaching, was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Here the Apostle not only admits the fact that his preaching, and that of his brethren, was devoid of the blandishments and captivating power of human learning and of the eloquence of the schools—but he repudiates the notion that any such charms were affected or desired on their part. Nay, so far as concerned himself, he distinctly affirms that he determined to discard every thing of the kind, and to forget, as it were, that he had ever sat at the feet of the celebrated Gamaliel.

But because the apostles were in this sense "unlearned," were they therefore ignorant? Had they no knowledge which

the generality did not possess? Had they no information to communicate which would be new even to the profoundest of scholars, and render them infinitely wiser than before? Read what he further says at the sixth verse, "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to naught, but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory. Which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."

Here, then, we see the reason why, in the instance before us, the rulers mar-

velled at the boldness of the Apostles—men unlearned and obscure, untaught in the schools, unacquainted with the subtleties of logic, and the forms of argumentation, and yet speaking with such majestic power, as to silence every opposing tongue. They spoke wisdom indeed ; but with lips of plain and unlettered men—lips which had never before addressed a learned assembly. Hitherto they had conversed only with their equals, a circumstance which was evident to all present, not only from their appearance, which indicated the meanness of their condition, but likewise from their speech, and yet such was the power of their eloquence in the instance we are considering, that instead of attempting to reply, the astonished magistrates could only express their wonder to each other in exclamations of surprise, and remind one another, at the same time, that they were recognized as the companions of the Nazarene whom they had so recently crucified. “ And they took know-

ledge of them that they had been with Jesus."

There are two ways in which this expression has been understood. The most obvious meaning is, that the rulers before whom they stood recollected to have seen them more or less frequently among the immediate followers of Christ, when he visited the Temple, or taught in the streets of the city. And from what we read both of Peter and of John, we have no difficulty in supposing that their persons would be more distinctly marked than those of the other Apostles. St. Peter was always the most ready and the most forward to execute our Lord's commands, and even to anticipate his wishes; whilst St. John clung the closest to his sacred person as the disciple whom, it is emphatically said, "Jesus loved."

But in addition to this plain and obvious recognition some writers contend for a different meaning. They suppose that the rulers perceived a resemblance between

the Apostles' manner and that of their Master—the same sort of moral bearing—the same dignity and energy of address—the same intrepidity of spirit.

Be this as it may—we know that there is a sense in which the true disciples of Jesus Christ may still be recognized as his, not only by their outward deportment, but by their spirit, and taste, and pursuits. Men may “take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus” in the truest and most sublime sense of the term—as pupils with their teacher—as servants with their Master—as followers with their leader—as soldiers with their general. “If any man,” says our Lord, “will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” “He that saith he abideth in him,” observes the Apostle John, “ought himself also so to walk even as he walked. And if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”

So strikingly does this resemblance between the spiritually-minded and con-

sistent Christian and the moral image of Jesus Christ sometimes beam forth, that even the sceptical and suspicious children of this world are compelled to acknowledge it, and to marvel at what they cannot understand. They see a strength of principle—an elevation of mind—a superiority to the motives which actuate all around them, which forces from them the exclamation, “Well, all are not hypocrites—that man at least is sincere—he is not one of us!” But here the conviction too frequently ends. Like the rulers and scribes of the council, they marvel, yet dislike—they express their surprise, but neither love, nor desire to imitate. They cannot gainsay the spiritual change which has been produced, but their enmity to the truth as it is in Jesus Christ is by no means removed.

“And beholding the man which was healed standing with them,” says the historian, “they could say nothing against it.” This is a remarkable testimony to

the truth of the apostolic miracles. So complete was the cure—so obvious and undeniable to all, that even the bitterest enemies of Christ could say nothing against it. Had it been possible to contradict it in any shape, or by any possible contrivance ;—had it been in the power of craftiness united to malice to confute it—a body of men thus endowed with power and skill and learning would doubtless have accomplished the task. But the attempt was useless.

What then was to be done in this perplexing state of things? To acknowledge themselves defeated in the presence of the prisoners would have been too humiliating to their pride. They commanded them therefore to withdraw, in order that they might deliberate the more freely upon the steps which they should now take.

“But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What

shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Magnanimous reply! How firm and yet respectful—how bold, and yet free from petulance! They recognize the authority of their rulers—but no further than was consistent with their obedience to a still higher authority. In the present instance they were commanded to forbear from doing that which the Most High God had enjoined them to perform. The one

authority said, "Speak no more in this name,"—the other had said, "Go preach my gospel to every creature; disciple all nations, and baptize them in my name." Could there be a question in any reasonable mind which of these conflicting commands was to be executed—which of these authorities was to be obeyed? The one authority was delegated—the other was supreme. The commands of the one were arbitrary and unjust—the commands of the other were merciful and good. Well might the apostles, therefore, appeal to the consciences of their unjust oppressors, and ask if they thought it reasonable or right to put aside the authority and commands of Jehovah in favour of theirs. "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye."

But though they thus appealed to the judgment and consciences of their rulers, they must at last be guided by the dictates of their own. They therefore added, in

terms not to be mistaken, their resolution at all hazards to persevere in testifying of those truths which they had that day proclaimed. A dispensation had been solemnly committed to them by their Master, and wo would be unto them, if they preached not the gospel ! “ We cannot,” say they, “ but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

There is much valuable instruction which we may derive from this example of the Apostles. There may be occasions in which we may be placed under somewhat similar circumstances, especially in our youth, when “ it is good for a man,” says the prophet, “ to bear the yoke.” It has sometimes happened that an ungodly parent has commanded his child to do what is positively forbidden in Scripture. A dishonest tradesman has sometimes required the apprentice or the servant to act or speak in direct opposition to the plain dictates of integrity and truth. What is to be done ? On the one hand, the son,

the apprentice, and the servant, are severally required by God's word to obey those that have the rule over them. On the other hand, the same divine word forbids the execution of certain deeds which those rulers enjoin. There is here a species of contrariety, which may puzzle and perplex the weak in mind. But the conduct of Peter and John may satisfy any reflecting mind, that the authority delegated to another by the Supreme Being ceases to be binding upon the subject, when made in any degree to contravene his revealed purposes and will. Whilst, however, it would, under such circumstances, be sinful, and the child, the apprentice, and the servant, are called upon to resist, oh! let them remember the spirit and the manner in which they are required to disobey—respectfully, courteously, meekly,—as well as firmly and without hesitation.

But to return to the case of the Apostles. Their reply to the rulers not being such

as involved them in contempt of court, there was nothing of which they could take advantage to inflict upon them punishment or restraint. Gladly indeed would they have visited them with summary chastisement, and perhaps imbued their hands in their innocent blood, as in that of their divine Master, had it not been for their apprehensions of a popular commotion ; for the multitude who beheld the marvellous cure wrought upon the impotent man were filled with admiration of God's goodness and power, and would doubtless have resented any injuries which might have been inflicted upon the instruments of such a miracle. Hence the resolution at which the council finally arrived, to dismiss them with a reiterated charge to refrain from persisting in a course which would subject them a second time to their displeasure. " So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people : for all men glorified

God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom the miracle was shewed.”

Thus did our Lord most marvellously preserve the lives of his faithful and undaunted servants, and filled their hearts with joy and peace in believing.

We are naturally desirous to know whither they proceeded, and what line of conduct they pursued, on being dismissed by the council. Our curiosity may be gratified by a brief consideration of the sequel of the story. “Being let go, they went to their own company,”—i. e. to where the rest of the Apostles were assembled, or to the upper room in which the hundred and twenty disciples had originally congregated together,—“and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.” The heartfelt congratulations which they mutually exchanged when they thus met must have been uncommonly powerful and touching. But there was nothing boastful or arrogant

in their expressions. Their triumph was not in themselves, but in their God and Saviour. Filled with gratitude and joy, they poured out their hearts with one accord in prayer to Jehovah, the Creator of heaven and earth, referring with peculiar fitness to the prophecy of David in his second psalm concerning the persecution to which Christ and his Church would be exposed, and to its final issue in the subjugation of every foe. “And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord ! thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is : who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things ? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.”

Such was the conspiracy of Herod and Pontius Pilate against our Saviour : such was the present confederacy of the Priests,

the Sadducees, and the scribes, against his chosen servants the Apostles ; and such is the union of the ungodly and profane, the sceptic and the licentious, against the best interests of his Church in this and every age. “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings ; and grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal ; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.”

Behold the anxiety which they here exhibit, not to be exempted from difficulties and trials, but to be strengthened to bear them, and to rise above them. They craved the energy of the Holy Ghost, which they had hitherto found so

effectual, and such miraculous attestations to the truth, as that which had already exposed them to the persecution of their enemies, but which glorified, at the same time, the name of the holy child Jesus. And what they thus asked with earnestness and in faith was speedily and miraculously bestowed. An effusion of the Holy Spirit, resembling in some degree that of the day of Pentecost, was immediately vouchsafed to them. “And when they had prayed,” it is said, “the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”

Mark, brethren, the emphasis with which this successful application for supernatural strength is declared. “And they spake the word of God with boldness.” What! after having just escaped the dire vengeance of the rulers—after having been “straitly charged not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus?” Yes!

They scrupled not to proclaim the same glad tidings of salvation through the crucified and risen Messiah, which were so obnoxious to the Sanhedrim; and, if it were possible, they were more undaunted, more full and explicit, more bold and uncompromising than before. God evidently overruled the opposition they had met with to the quickening of their own souls—to the increase of their faith and confidence in the Saviour—and to the strengthening of their purpose to venture liberty and life itself in executing the charge committed to their trust. Their personal trial had thus operated favourably both as it regarded their own character, and the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom.

And is not this still seen to be the effect of the afflictions, and trials, and opposition of ungodly or unreasonable men, to which the Ministers of Christ are still more or less exposed in the discharge of their arduous duties? Undoubtedly—where recourse is had in their hour of

affliction to the same gracious and Almighty friend. He makes their profiting to appear unto all men. They come out of the furnace purified as gold. And be the character of their affliction what it may—be it personal or domestic—mental or corporeal—it is overruled to the increase of their holiness and their usefulness. They can then testify of God's goodness, and the Saviour's love, and the power of his communicated strength, with a boldness and a decision which no inexperienced pastor can properly exhibit. They can then testify not only of what they suppose, and believe, and deduce—but of what they know by personal experience, and are assured of in their inmost souls. Hence is it that the most faithful and the most edifying of God's ministering servants are generally the most severely tried,—in order that from their own experience they may be able to instruct and comfort the people committed to their charge. And many such, I doubt not, are to be found

who can take up with sincerity the language of the persecuted and suffering, but still joyful and rejoicing Apostle, and say, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation."

LECTURE VII.

ACTS v. 11—16.

And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

And by the hands of the Apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people: (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least, the shadow of Peter passing by, might overshadow some of them.

There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

THE event recorded in the preceding context—the sudden and judicial death of

Ananias and Sapphira—is inexpressibly awful and admonitory. Eighteen hundred years have passed away since it occurred, but the lessons which it teaches are ever present, and still does its recital awaken attention, and cause “the ear of every one that heareth it to tingle.” To every deliberate and presumptuous offender it speaks in alarming accents. It tells him in language not to be mistaken that God is not mocked—that he is the discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. You may “lie unto the Holy Ghost,” but you cannot deceive him. He penetrates into the deepest recesses of the soul, and scans the motives of every action and of every word. Nor is it with a Being who is omniscient merely, that you have to do, but with a Being who cannot tolerate sin—who cannot look upon iniquity, and who will by no means clear the guilty. He who penetrated into the secret motives and sentiments and feelings, of Ananias and Sapphira, penetrates also into yours; and

if your transgression in any measure resembles theirs, so also does the aspect in which God regards it. The mere circumstance that in the one case life is prolonged, whilst in the other it was cut short by a violent death, makes no difference. If the present world were the only or principal scene of punishment, then might the absence of such judicial interpositions be construed favourably to the future and everlasting condition of the offender : but since this world is a state of probation rather than of retribution, the prolongation of life and the warding off of calamity may ultimately issue in aggravated condemnation at the last. If the long-suffering mercy of the Most High be rightly improved—if the sinner avail himself of the opportunities which it affords to seek a Saviour whilst he may be found—well : he shall not die, but save his soul alive. But if, on the other hand, he despises the riches of the divine goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not

knowing that the goodness of God leadeth him to repentance—then, after his hardness and impenitent heart, does he treasure up to himself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render unto every man according to his deeds. Does not even nature teach the same when properly appealed to? “The earth,” remarks the Apostle, “which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessings from God: but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.”

But though judgment may appear to be God’s strange work, though he continue to bear long and is kind—yet is there in all cases a limit to his forbearance. Though many suns may rise and set upon the wicked, yet will the last morning or evening of their existence arrive ere long. Under one shape or another death at last

overtakes them, and lays them low. It may be that they are summoned hastily and without previous notice. Yes; and it may be that they are arrested in the very act of wilful disobedience. Instances are recorded of the perjurer being smitten by the hand of death whilst calling heaven and earth to witness his pretended veracity. The liar—the slanderer—the profane swearer, have severally expired with his awful crime upon his lips. And how often, alas! has the drunkard expired in his brutish state of intoxication, leaving no hope to his surviving friends and relatives that he has escaped the condemnation of hell. He dies under circumstances which exclude every ray of consolation—without hope, and without God in the world. For what though there be nothing supernatural in the stroke which lays such a transgressor low? What though his death result in the natural course of things from the effects of his inebriating draught, or from the excitement under which he acted?

What though the opinion of the physician be that the man died of apoplexy? And what though the coroner, the jury, the journals, the public, reiterate that opinion? Nay! and what, though that opinion be correct? Is the fact less true that the man expires in wilful and deliberate sin—that as a rebel and a self-murderer he is ushered without warning into the presence of his insulted Sovereign and Judge?

Here is the true ground for feelings of horror and dismay. Here lies the essentially tragical character of such events: and to this point it is that I wish more especially to call your attention. Whether the transgressor be cut down immediately by the hand of God, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, or have his existence suddenly terminated by some fatal and assignable cause—the eternal consequences will be the same. To the bystanders—to those who either see or hear of the event, there will be doubtless less of consternation in the one case than

in the other ; but with respect to the punishment to be endured by the transgressor himself there will be no difference.

Consider then a moment. Is sudden death a very rare event ? Is it a circumstance which occurs once in an age, or to one in a million of our species ? Go, consult the records of mortality around you. What say our monthly, our weekly, nay, our daily journals ? What is the testimony of our own immediate neighbourhood ? What family can you meet with among some or other of whose connections the king of terrors has not more or less suddenly made his appearance ? But go further still, and enlarge the boundary of your inquiries. What say that valuable and numerous class of men whose occupation brings them into scenes of mortality more frequently than others ? What say our physicians and our surgeons ? Yes ! ask the faculty for a plain unvarnished tale, and let them tell you how often they are summoned in breathless

haste to the dying couch of some poor patient who is almost unconscious of their presence. Perhaps he has met with a serious accident which has fractured his skull, or injured the spine, or produced some internal injury too deeply seated to be repaired. Perhaps he has broken a blood-vessel, and he dies of exhaustion or syncope. Perhaps the symptoms unequivocally declare that apoplexy has ensued, and to the loudest questions of surrounding relatives and friends there is no voice nor answer. Or it may be that the mainspring of the machine has collapsed or become paralysed, and the heart itself has ceased, under some mysterious influence, to send forth its life-current through its diversified channels.

Now see, brethren, what in every such case must be the inevitable result. The eternal doom—the everlasting destinies of the man become, in one awful moment, fixed and immutable. No sooner does the cold hand of death arrest him—

whether it be at home or abroad, at his rising up in the morning or at his lying down at night, in his private study or in the haunts of commerce, during his hours of business or at the time of his repose, in the society of the virtuous and the godly or amid frivolous and licentious companions, at his own temperate board, or at the festive banquet—than the momentous question is at once settled, whether happiness or misery shall be his unending portion. Then is the voice heard by the ear of faith declaring in words of inspired truth: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”

Is the individual a true disciple of Jesus Christ—has he fled for refuge to the hope set before him in the gospel—has he passed from condemnation unto life? Then does death with all its apparent horrors but fix him the more speedily in the perpetuity of

the divine favour—then sudden death is sudden glory. But has the calamity befallen one that is impenitent and unbelieving—one that is living in known and deliberate sin—then alas! being condemned already, his condemnation is irrevocably sealed—he departs under the impelling influence of an invisible but irresistible power “to his own place,” and has his portion assigned him, according to the extent of his criminality, in all the horrors of the second death.

But is sudden death the only kind of dissolution to be feared? Is it the only form in which a man is deprived of all opportunity to call upon God that he perish not? Be not deceived, brethren, by a notion so groundless. Experience declares that in numberless cases where existence is prolonged for days and weeks in the sick chamber, the poor patient is as good as dead to all moral purposes. See how his faculties are estranged or spell-bound by disease. How perversely he

reasons—how incoherently he talks ! Or if the powers of his understanding are not enfeebled, how are all his thoughts engrossed by the urgent demands of an agonised frame ! He cannot fix them upon anything but on the pain which he is compelled to endure ; and if he has recourse to soporifics to assuage the pain, he puts at the same time, an extinguisher upon his mind.

And even in cases where the patient might think with vigour and effect, he is dissuaded from doing so by some relative, or friend, or medical attendant who cares more for his body than his soul, and he dies away like the expiring taper when it flickers in the socket, unconscious of his state. He departs peacefully—quietly—gradually, relying upon the flattering and deceitful declarations of men who, under the influence of a mistaken and fatal tenderness, have endeavoured to deceive him, and never once examines himself to see whether he is in the faith, and never once cries for mercy as a dying man.

Now all this is of frequent and of constant occurrence. Not a day nor an hour passes in which it is not probable that some individual or other in this large community is thus circumstanced, and thus dealt with.

Taking then all these things into consideration—bearing in mind the frequency of sudden death properly so called—the still greater frequency of disqualifying and overwhelming sickness, and the very general deception which is practised upon the patient, or which the patient practises upon himself—and what is the result? That the man who lives in the commission of known sin—the man who puts off the exercise of repentance towards God and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, is acting the part of a maniac. He is standing deliberately on the confines of that lake which burneth with brimstone and with fire. In one moment—in the twinkling of an eye, his foot may slip, and he is gone !

And alas ! Is not this the part which some of you, my brethren, are acting at this moment ? Are not some of you living in the practice of some one or other of those deeds of the flesh which holy scripture declares to be incompatible with a hope of salvation ? I pray you search and see. Sacrilege, and falsehood, and a “lying unto the Holy Ghost,” such as the crime of Ananias involved, are not the only transgressions which disqualify a man for heaven. There are many other sins as clearly defined, and as explicitly denounced in the word of God. “Know ye not (asks St. Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians) that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God ? Be not deceived ; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” And again in his Epistle to the Galatians, he observes :

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like : of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” In similar terms he warns the Ephesians : “Let no man deceive you with vain words ; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.”

Suppose then that I could put to you, brethren, the question Peter put to Ananias, and ask you in direct terms, “whether you sold the land for so much”—whether such and such transactions were strictly honest—could you reply with a safe conscience, “Yea for so much ! I have injured no man ; I have defrauded no man ?” Or varying the terms of the inquiry, should I ask you in reference to

the several offences enumerated in the dark catalogues of holy writ, whether you live in the commission of any one of them—could you, without lying unto the Holy Ghost, lay your hand upon your breast, and say, “not guilty!” Are there not some amongst you who know that they cannot? Their conscience tells them that they are practising some gainful fraud—pursuing some devious course—indulging in some hurtful lust—or gratifying some base desire—of which the unerring word of God declares that the end is eternal death. And what is there that separates them from such an awful doom? The little span of life which at best is quickly traversed, and (as we have already seen,) frequently cut short without a moment’s warning. Oh! suppose for a moment, that some accident or disease should surprise you in your present condition, ere another sun set in the western sky, and you find yourself incapacitated for thought and reflection. How awful—how pitiable—how

helpless—how hopeless your state ! Let the fever rage with a little more violence—let the pulse beat at a somewhat quicker rate—let the hemorrhage flow with a more rapid current—or the brain be a little more oppressed from the ruptured blood-vessel, and the work is finished ! You are as effectually, if not as instantaneously hurried into the presence of the Most High as were Ananias and Sapphira—and you will carry with you your sins as unrepented of, and as unpardoned, if not as recently committed, as was theirs. Oh that you “were wise, and understood these things, and would consider your latter end !” May God help you so to do, ere it be too late, immediately without a moment’s delay. “This is the accepted time—this is the day of salvation.”

Nor let any of you, my brethren, deceive himself with the vain hope that because he is happily exempt from the charge of gross immorality, that therefore he is a Christian, and is prepared for

death. Oh no ; you must be the characters whom the Saviour describes as his true followers if you would hope to enter at last into his blissful presence. Remember to whom it was said by the Almighty, “Thou fool ! this night thy soul shall be required of thee ; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?” It was not to the dishonest man—the slanderer—the liar—the drunkard—the sabbath-breaker. It was to “a certain rich man whose ground brought forth plentifully ; and he thought within himself, saying, what shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits ? And he said, This will I do. I will pull down my barns, and build greater ; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul ! thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease—eat, drink, and be merry.’” It was to such an one that God said, “Thou fool !” And what was our Saviour’s remark with reference to the case ? “So

is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." If, therefore, you are living to yourselves—providing, however honestly, for the life that now is, but neglecting that which is to come—coveting what you do not want, and withholding more than is meet—minding the things of the world, and forgetting the things which are Jesus Christ's—then are you acting the part of a "fool" in the eyes of your Creator! you plan for an existence which may terminate in a moment, and you give no thought about a life which shall never end!

But whilst the subject we have now been considering is awful and solemn in the extreme, and should produce in every unrenewed and unconverted sinner great searchings of heart—it is at the same time very closely connected with a topic equally consolatory and encouraging; viz., the willingness of God to accept the penitent believing sinner, and his solemn engagement to pardon his transgressions—how

numerous—how long continued—how aggravated soever. In the one instance we behold the severity—in the other the goodness of our God. Behold in Ananias and Sapphira an instance of his severity : behold, in the remaining portion of our text, numerous and cheering instances of his goodness ! Withdrawing his hand speedily from his strange work of judgment, he returns without delay to execute his deeds of mercy. One act of compassionate goodness had previously been wrought, sufficiently wonderful to excite the astonishment of the city. But behold ! now, the amazing liberality with which his miraculous benefits are bestowed ! “ And by the hands of the Apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.” What these many signs and wonders were, we are told in the sequel of the passage : they were miracles of healing,—and, as such, were signs and tokens of Christ’s power, compassion, and benevolence—signs that he had authority

to forgive sins, as well as to remit punishment—signs too that the Apostles were his divinely commissioned officers. And accordingly we read in a sort of parenthesis the following account of the effects produced on the minds of the beholders : “ And they, (i.e. the Apostles,) were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch. And of the rest, (i.e. of other hypocrites or dissemblers, such as Ananias and Sapphira,) durst no man join himself to them : but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” Thus we find that whilst unsound characters were deterred by fear from entering into the church, vast numbers of sincere, honest, simple-minded persons were encouraged to come forward, and make an open profession of their faith.

The multiplicity of the wonders thus wrought before the people, as well as their benevolent and merciful character, is thus described in the 15th and 16th verses :

“Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. Then there came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and they which were vexed with unclean spirits : and they were healed every one.”

What love and compassion, as well as wisdom and power, are here displayed ! The judgment was one—it was solitary and alone ; but the favours which he wrought were numerous, and diversified. And how strictly does the analogy hold in spiritual things ! How multiplied are the instances of God’s forbearance and compassion, compared with those of his vindictory and judicial rebukes ! How far more frequently does he stretch forth his hand to heal, than to destroy ! For one Ananias that is struck down with indignation as a rebel against his authority, what multitudes of spiritual patients are cleansed and healed !

That a striking similarity exists between the miracles of healing wrought by the Apostles and the spiritual cures which the heavenly Physician is at once able and willing to effect, must be obvious to every attentive inquirer.

The symptoms of spiritual disease are no less numerous and diversified than those of bodily disease. In some men they are of a violent description ; in others they are of a mild and gentle character. In some we behold the fever of lust and intemperance raging with maddening influence ; in others the wasting away of a lingering consumption, or the lethargy of indifference. In the former case the symptoms are so violent that they cannot be mistaken—in the latter they are more gentle and therefore the less easily discerned. But the danger is not the less real, nor the less to be apprehended, when the sinner is unconscious of his state, any more than that of the patient who deceiving himself, or deceived by his friends,

cheers his latest hours with fallacious hopes of recovery.

But, blessed be God, there is provision in the covenant of grace for the recovery of every spiritual patient on the face of the earth. In that covenant a remedy is provided amply sufficient for every spiritual disease, how deeply seated, how inveterate soever it be ! Of the sick folks who were brought to the Apostles from all quarters of the land, it is emphatically said, in the closing words of the text, “And they were healed every one.” When once the power of the Almighty was present to heal, difficulty there was none : every species of disorder fled away without exception or reserve.

Nor in spiritual diseases is any thing too hard for the Lord to accomplish. The fever of intemperance—the lethargy of indifference and security—the wasting consumption of worldly minds—these and numberless other diseases, are instantly checked by the remedies of the gospel.

Let these remedies be applied by the heavenly Physician, even though it be through the instrumentality of their poor fellow-patients, and the effects are instantly produced. The spiritually deaf recover their hearing, and the spiritually dumb their speech; the eyes of the blind also are made effectually to see, and the halt and the lame to leap for joy. The whole man becomes renewed, and every faculty of the soul receives fresh life and vigour.

But if all this be true, how can we account for the lamentable fact that few comparatively are made whole? Incredible as the assertion may at first sight appear, it is, because men prefer sickness to health. They choose rather to remain diseased as they are—unmolested and unrebuked—at liberty to indulge their passions and live in sin, than to be brought into such a state of health and soundness as would impose upon them any restraint, and deny them the licence in which they delight to live. And not only so but they

are ignorant, for the most part, of the extent of their malady, and, in a corresponding degree, they are insensible to their danger. Being insensible to their danger the Physician's aid is refused, and they come not within the sphere of his influence. Hence they continue diseased, when they might have been cured—and finally they taste the bitter pains of eternal death, whereas they might have had their spiritual health restored, and live for ever !

LECTURE VIII.

ACTS v. 33—42.

When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the Apostles forth a little space.

And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves, what ye intend to do as touching these men.

For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody, to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves; who was slain, and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

After this man rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after

him : he also perished, and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

And now I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone : for if this counsel, or this work be of men, it will come to nought.

But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

And to him they agreed : and when they had called the Apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

YOUR attention, my brethren, has already been called to the religious tenets of the men who formed the majority of the Jewish Council before whom the Apostles were now arraigned, and to the persecuting spirit which they displayed towards the early Christians notwithstanding their ostentatious professions of liberality. Nor should we be slow to learn from the narrative to mistrust the fair promises of infidelity in whatever garb she may present

herself. Were the instance indeed a solitary one which we are now considering—were it unexampled in other ages, or among other people, we might be thought to do the sceptic and the latitudinarian an injustice in throwing out such suspicions. But so far from this being the case, the history of infidelity in all countries and among all periods of the Church is written in characters of blood. But as we are usually more affected by instances near at hand, it may be sufficient to be reminded of the reign of terror in a neighbouring country some fifty years ago. The sadducean spirit of infidelity had been previously gaining ground for a lengthened period—its professions of liberality were loud and frequent—its philosophers denounced intolerance, and its poets sang of charity and love—and fools there were sufficient, as in this day, and among our own deluded population, to credit their sincerity, and rely upon their professions. But no sooner did a fitting opportunity

arise, no sooner did political circumstances favour their attempt, than they waged war with Christianity in every form, renouncing its authority, dishonouring its institutions, defiling its temples, confiscating its possessions, persecuting its followers, banishing, imprisoning, or slaughtering its ministers."

The page of history is studied to little purpose, if, with such results of infidelity before us in the case of guilty and wretched France, we deceive ourselves with the vain expectation that its promises may be trusted, and its liberality be depended upon. No, brethren. The sceptic is one in whom it would be worse than folly to confide; and strangely perverse are they who, professing to value the interests of Christianity, and to long for the establishment of peace and purity and truth, yet scruple not to use their exertions to elevate to stations of influence and authority men whose religious sentiments are notoriously loose, heterodox, or sceptical.

There is something in genuine Christianity which the sadducean sceptic detests with the bitterest hate; and though while the fitting occasion is wanting, no voice is heard but that of toleration and kindness, yet when the opportunity arrives the delusion is speedily dissipated, and the siren notes of a pretended charity are exchanged for the loud thunders of threatening and of vengeance.

It was so in a very remarkable degree in the instance we are now reviewing. The Sadducees were opposed to many of the essential truths of revelation, but their enmity was chiefly directed against the doctrine of the resurrection. To find the Apostles therefore persisting in their resolution to preach that doctrine in the name of Jesus whom they professed to have seen alive after his crucifixion—to perceive that they had convinced multitudes of the truth of their declarations, and to hear from their own lips that they considered it to be their imperative duty to continue

to proclaim the exaltation of their risen Lord in spite of all opposition, was more than they could endure. "When they heard it they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them."

The expression "cut to the heart" is very emphatic, and implies the extremity of vexation and wrath. Very different were the emotions excited in the breasts of the multitude on a former occasion, when, as it is said, they were "pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" In each case the preacher was the same, and so also was the testimony. In each case strong emotions were produced, and the heart was made to feel much that was painful and afflictive. But ah! how opposite the character of those emotions, and how different the final result! Well may it remind us of the Apostle Paul's description of the contrary effects of the gospel on different hearers. To some it is a savour

of "life unto life," and to others of "death unto death."

And is not this contrariety still visible in the reception which is given to the tidings of salvation amongst ourselves? Are there not some whom a preached gospel only cuts to the heart, without producing any genuine contrition for sin, much less any practical renunciation of its dominion and power? They are vexed, and annoyed, and made uncomfortable, but they transfer their displeasure from themselves to the word which condemns them, or to the preacher at whose lips they hear it.

But though the council before whom the Apostles now stood was for the most part composed of Sadducees, and persons of sceptical and persecuting principles, yet not entirely so. One remarkable exception is recorded in the narrative—that of Gamaliel, a man of orthodox principles, and distinguished alike for his great learning, and his exemplary conduct. When he perceived to what extravagant lengths

the majority of the council were disposed to proceed in their opposition to the Apostles, he wisely and effectually interfered, suggesting as a preliminary to his remarks, that the prisoners should be withdrawn. "Then stood there up one in the council, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the Apostles forth for a little space."

To enter into all the questions which have been raised respecting the parentage and history of this distinguished man, would be to occupy your time and attention to little purpose. It may be sufficient to remind you of St. Paul's connection with him as a pupil during his youthful studies, having been "brought up (as he himself tells us) at the feet of Gamaliel." By profession he was a doctor or teacher of the Jewish code—his office being to expound the law of Moses to ecclesiastical students, if not to the people generally, and to imbue them with the traditions of the Rabbis.

The sect of the Pharisees, to which he belonged, was characterized, for the most part, by harshness and severity. But this venerable man rose above the prevailing spirit of his party; and whilst his own mind was governed by sentiments of humanity and forbearance, he strove to conciliate those around him to a corresponding temper. His advice to the members of the council, after directing the Apostles to be removed for a little while, was most judicious. He exhorts them, in the first place, to be cautious in their proceedings, and to resolve nothing rashly as to their treatment of the prisoners. “And he said unto them, ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.”

There is much judgment displayed in thus commencing his address. He does not presume to offer them his own opinion as to the innocence or guilt of the prisoners,—much less to exasperate their minds by charging them with heterodoxy on the

important doctrine of a resurrection from the dead. He simply advises caution. Be the merits or demerits of the question what they might, it was the part of a grave and deliberate assembly to avoid precipitation. "Be on your guard," he seems to say, "lest you suffer your feelings of displeasure to carry you away, and induce you to adopt measures of violence which future circumstances may cause you to regret." They might think indeed that the circumstances which had occurred required immediate interference, and that their own safety and the welfare of the nation were in instant jeopardy from the rapid progress of Christianity. But this was not the first time that the public mind had been agitated without any very injurious results except to the very authors of the commotion, and their immediate followers. Two such instances they might all recollect to have heard, and to these he would now direct their attention.

“Before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody ; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves ; who was slain ; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him. He also perished ; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.”

I shall not occupy your time in solving the chronological difficulties which some commentators have suggested with reference to this passage, in consequence of one Theudas being mentioned by Josephus in connection with an insurrection which took place some years subsequent to the meeting of the council. The name was common among the Jews, nor is it difficult to imagine that a son or a grandson of an elder Theudas to whom Gamaliel refers, followed the footsteps of his ancestors in the days of Josephus.

It must have been about thirty or forty

years before the time of the council that the former insurrection took place; for Judas is said to have risen up after him, “in the days of the taxing,” which is probably identical with the assessment made under the superintendence of Cyrenius, governor of Syria, several years after our Lord’s nativity. At that time Archelaus, the son of Herod, was deposed from the sovereignty, and Judea was reduced into the form of a Roman province.

After reminding the council of these two instances of unsuccessful imposture and insurrection, he proceeds to found upon them the following advice. “And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”

Gamaliel here advances to an intimation, which, at the first, his prudence taught him to withhold; viz., that it was

far from being certain that the Apostles were either enthusiasts or impostors—that the miracles which they were said to perform were too well authenticated, and the doctrines which they promulgated too much in accordance with the writings of the Old Testament, to justify any hasty conclusion to the contrary. ‘Now supposing,’ he seems to say, that ‘the God of our Fathers has revealed himself to these men in some miraculous and extraordinary manner, and that their testimony is the “truth, and nothing but the truth,” what will be the consequence of our hasty and inconsiderate opposition? We shall be acting in direct hostility to Jehovah—we shall be contending with our Maker ; and I need not say how fatal will be the result. Our efforts against the truth will recoil upon our own heads, and instead of overthrowing it, we shall be overthrown ourselves. On the other hand, supposing that your present suspicions be well founded, and that these men are acting the part of de-

signing demagogues, and endeavouring to make the people believe in a false Messiah, then is it equally clear that they will be found fighting against God, and will bring upon themselves swift destruction. Be patient, therefore, and let them alone. Examine their claims, but do not persecute them. Keep your eye upon their proceedings, but refrain from injuring them.'

Such was the counsel of Gamaliel, and such the argument on which it was founded. To do justice, however, to his reasoning, we must consider his position with reference to particular circumstances, rather than as a general and universal one, applicable alike to every case. That there were particular circumstances connected with Christianity which justified him in predicting that it would come to nought, if it were not really of God, must be plain to every one who reflects upon the subject. Look, for instance, at the doctrines which the Apostle preached.

How ill fitted to attract the attention, and conciliate the approbation of mankind, whether Jews or Gentiles! To the former, their testimony respecting the promised Messiah, that he was no other than the lowly, the despised, the crucified Nazarene, was a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. To the latter it was foolishness. The one demanded a philosopher who should preside over the schools of the learned, and teach them some new thing in physics or in science with unrivalled eloquence and skill. To satisfy the other he must be invested with temporal authority, and after liberating his nation from the tyranny of the Roman yoke, ascend the throne of David, and extend his dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. With such prepossessions and desires how could the one or the other hear with complacency of pardon and grace through one who was admitted to have been crucified through weakness? There was to such

minds nothing in the Christian system, on its first promulgation by the Apostles, which was not calculated, in itself, to excite hatred and derision.

In addition to this, Christianity demanded from every man a practice which ran counter to all the corrupt habits of the world. It required the exercise of self-denial, and purity, and vigilance, and meekness, and humility, from men who were notoriously proud and highminded, and stubborn, and impatient, and self-indulgent. It proclaimed, indeed, a Saviour mighty to deliver, but delivering only in one way, by breaking the yoke of spiritual thralldom, and subduing every thought to the obedience of Christ, a Saviour *from* and not *in* sin, a Saviour whose spirit was to be imbibed, whose example was to be followed, whose commands were to be obeyed. To worldly men it must have been anything but well-pleasing to be required to mortify ambition and avarice, to relinquish the licentious practices of the

age, to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts.

It were difficult indeed to specify any class of men whose prejudices would not be strongly excited against the pretensions of Christianity. For what were those pretensions? Not merely that it was a true religion, but the only true religion,—that all other religions were false. It not only solicited notice, but demanded the exclusive attention of mankind. It proclaimed every other system to be false, and injurious, and fatal to men's souls. It bore the character therefore of intolerance, and as such was detested even among the polytheists of Greece and Rome, who had their Gods many and their Lords many. Had it been satisfied with less exclusive regards—had it modestly put in its claims with other systems of religion for a portion of general esteem, it might have met with some favour from many who would now spurn it from them in disgust.

And then, who were the promulgators

of this new religion? who were these Apostles now arraigned before the High Priest and his august council? Was there anything in their birth, their family alliances, their early education, their talents, their acquirements, their possessions, or their influence, which could give them an advantage in their attempt to make all men obedient to their faith? On the contrary was there not everything of this character on the side of their opponents, and nothing whatever on theirs? Were they not poor, and comparatively illiterate? Were they not, for the most part, humble fishermen of Galilee, unacquainted with the manners and customs of the world, and unskilled in the rudiments of human lore? They had no personal endowments, no acquired reputation, no support from men of rank or influence, to give them any hope of success; and assuredly had they been left unaided by a higher power no rational hope could have been entertained that they would finally prevail.

On these and similar grounds Gamaliel was obviously justified in predicting that if this counsel or this work were of men, it would come to nought—that after the present excitement had subsided it would cease to make any progress among the people—that with nothing human, in short, to befriend and support it, and with everything that was wise and powerful, and influential among men to oppose it, it must inevitably and speedily perish.

But what was the fact? Our assembling together this day in the name of Jesus of Nazareth in some measure answers the question. Instead of coming speedily to nought, it made a rapid and extensive progress over not only Judea, to which it was confined when Gamaliel uttered his memorable saying, but over the greater part of the then known world. Its conquests not only rivalled, but exceeded those of Greece and Rome. And what neither the philosophy of the one, nor the prowess of the other could achieve, the doctrine of

the Apostles was found adequate to perform. It tamed the fiercest barbarians—it tutored the wildest savages—it humbled the proud and exalted the lowly to eminence—it checked the reign of vice with a magic influence, and caused its disciples of every colour and of every clime to love as brethren, to cherish peace and unity, and uprightness, to obey magistrates, to fear God, and honour their Prince. Scarcely had the first century after this expired, when we find Justin Martyr thus testifying to the wonderful propagation of Christianity in the world: “There is not a nation,” says he, “whether of Greeks or Barbarians, in which prayers and thanksgivings are not offered up to the Father and Maker of all things, in the name of the crucified Jesus.” And a similar testimony is afforded us from the pen of Tertullian, with which every scholar is familiar. “We are but of yesterday,” he observes, whilst addressing himself to those in authority among the heathen, and

“yet we have filled every place—your cities, your islands, your garrisons, your towns, your camps, your senate, your forum. We have left nothing empty but your Temples.”

The legitimate inference to be drawn from all this is sufficiently obvious. Sceptical historians and infidel philosophers, may try to explain it as they may, but the truth is written as with a sunbeam, and every candid and intelligent inquirer will not fail to perceive that the finger of God was here employed, that the work was his, and therefore could not be overthrown.

The argument and the advice of Gamaliel were so far successful as to restrain his fellow counsellors from proceeding to extremities. But though they agreed to refrain from putting the Apostles to death, yet they were resolved to inflict upon them some species of summary punishment before they again set them at liberty; and to reiterate their unlawful commands to cease from propagating such

obnoxious tenets. “And when they had called the Apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.”

But how absurd, as well as impious the prohibition! What could it avail with men who knew that God was with them of a truth, and who had just received a charge from an angelic messenger deputed to deliver them from their recent thralldom, to go and stand and speak in the Temple to the people all the words of this life? What could it avail with men who gloried in their master's service, and in all the tribulation which it entailed? So far from terrifying them into a guilty silence, it would tend rather to fill their hearts with gladness, and to open their lips with praise. Such was, in fact, the immediate and glorious result, as we find in the closing words of the text: “And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted

worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the Temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

In all this they acted a most consistent as well as noble part. The word which they were divinely instructed to promulgate was the word of life. The Saviour whom they had undertaken to proclaim was the only Saviour of a guilty world—his atonement the only propitiation—his spirit the only purifier—his doctrines the only saving truth, and faith in his mediation the only ground which could justify a sinner. Their cause, then, they felt to be paramount. Come what might in the way of suffering, all was light and momentary compared with the consequences involved in the wide-spread diffusion of the truth as it is in Jesus. No time was to be lost—souls were perishing around them for lack of knowledge, and that knowledge had been imparted to them for the express purpose of imparting it to

others. Hence, at all times and in all places—in the Temple and at the forum—in the synagogue and on the public ways, they proclaimed the salvation of their God. In season and out of season they were instant in their great work of preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

But whilst we thus expatiate on the virtues and graces of the magnanimous Apostles, let us not forget to emulate their example. It is a duty founded on the most express command, to “be followers of them, who through faith and patience now inherit the promises.”

Seek, then, dear brethren, to live under the influence of that most pleasing and most powerful principle which governed all their actions, and rendered their piety thus heroic. That principle was “love.” “The love of Christ constrained them to live not unto themselves, but unto him who loved them, and gave himself for them.” Nor is there any other principle sufficiently energetic to elevate the heart and mind

above that fear of man which bringeth a snare, and that respect for the world's admiration which is replete with moral danger. Without this principle vigorously operating in our souls we shall never be cordially willing to suffer shame for our Saviour's sake, or to glory in partaking in some degree of his sufferings.

Covet earnestly, then, this most excellent gift ; and endeavour by earnest prayer, and devout meditation on the love of your Redeemer, to have your gratitude awakened, and your affections kindled towards him in return. Feeling that you have had much forgiven, you will love much ; and loving much you will suffer cheerfully, obey promptly, and follow steadily. Your endurance of evil will be like that of the Apostles before us : it will be characterised not only by firmness, but by meekness. You will not only set your face like a flint against all ungodliness, but you will be gentle towards all men—not rendering railing for railing, but contrari-

wise blessing, you will “not be overcome of evil,” but will “overcome evil with good.”

But are there not those amongst us to whom the passage we have this evening been contemplating suggests a solemn and important caution? Are there not some who may be properly warned against acting rashly in resisting the claims of the gospel? Are there not some who may be said to be fighting against God? Alas! how vain—how self-destructive the contest. Let the potsherd of the earth strive with the potsherd of the earth, but woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!

And yet how many are waging the unequal conflict with little or no apprehensions of danger! They think the Almighty to be such a one as themselves, as indifferent to sin—as lenient to transgressions—as irresolute to execute his threatenings. They trust, in the blindness of their understanding, to the exercise of an undefined and unpromised mercy.

But let them not be deceived : God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. “Yea! though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.” “He shall break them at length with a rod of iron—he shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Be wise, therefore, now, ye transgressors of his covenant—ye backsliders from his ways—ye rebellious, unholy, and profane. “Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and so ye perish from the right way when his wrath is kindled but a little.”

LECTURE IX.

ACTS vi.

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

Wherefore brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of of Antioch.

Whom they set before the Apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

And the word of God increased ; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly ; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

And Stephen full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia, and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

Then they suborned men which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council.

And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law.

For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

To enter properly on the consideration of the chapter before us, it is requisite that we should be reminded of the situation and circumstances of the infant Church as

briefly unfolded to us in the two preceding chapters.

In consequence of the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, when Peter preached his memorable sermon, and also on a subsequent occasion, a vast accession of converts had been made. Among these were persons of all classes and conditions of life ; but the great majority were comparatively poor, and dependent upon their daily labour for support, whilst many doubtless were in circumstances still more humble and dependent, and disqualified by age and infirmities from gaining a livelihood for themselves. To provide for the wants especially of the latter, those who had possessions came forward with the most unbounded liberality, confidence, and affection, and threw the proceeds of their sale into a common treasury, out of which all who were in necessity might receive a daily supply of things needful for the body. This is what we are to understand,

I think, by the expression, in chap. iv. 32, "They had all things in common;" not, as some have imagined, that all the disciples united to support each other in idleness upon the proceeds of their common property; but that such was the warmth of their zeal for their Master's cause—such the ardour of their attachment to one another as his persecuted followers—and such the elevation of their minds above the ordinary considerations of a prudential and selfish nature, that those amongst them who had estates, whether of houses or of lands, voluntarily surrendered them to the church for the benefit of their poorer brethren. That this sacrifice on the part of the wealthier members of the infant Church was a voluntary sacrifice, which they were free to make or to withhold, is directly affirmed by St. Peter. Nor can so extraordinary an instance of liberality under such extraordinary circumstances be alleged as a precedent which it would be either wise or expedient

for Christians literally to follow in this age and country. Still, however, it is the duty and the privilege of Christ's disciples in every age and in every country, to act up to the spirit of such noble and disinterested conduct, by being ready to give and willing to communicate out of the stores which God hath given them, according to the rule laid down by the Apostle Paul: "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, and specially unto them that are of the household of faith." "Charge them who are rich in this world that they be ready to distribute, and willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." And then as to the measure of our liberality, we have this solemn remark from the pen of inspiration: "He that soweth little shall reap little; and he that soweth plenteously shall reap plenteously. Let every man do according as he is disposed in his heart, not grudgingly

or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver."

But beautiful and noble as was the disinterestedness of the early Christians, it did not so pervade every heart as completely to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. On the contrary, the love of some began ere long to wax cold, and a spirit of jealousy and discontent served to mar the universal harmony. With a reference to this unhappy circumstance the chapter before us opens. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration."

The widows here alluded to were the surviving partners of foreign and domestic Jews, distinguished respectively by the terms Grecians and Hebrews. The Grecians were Jews, who resided at a distance from Judea, and spoke Greek, the general language of the East, instead

of the Hebrew Syriac, the language of Palestine. Having taken up their abode in Jerusalem in consequence of their conversion, or for other reasons, they composed a part of the Church in that city. The Hebrews, on the other hand, were Jews who resided wholly in Jerusalem or Judea, and spake the mixed dialect already described. These were accused by the Grecians of neglecting their widows in the daily administration, while they were not unmindful to provide for their own.

Whether there was any just ground for such complaints is not stated. Perhaps the persons employed to distribute the alms may have favoured the one more than the other, from an impression that as far the larger portion of the public stock was contributed by the Hebrews, their widows had a stronger claim than those of the Grecians: or possibly the distribution might be perfectly impartial, but the suspicions of the Grecians were awakened by some misrepresentations to which they had

given ear. Be this as it may, Satan took advantage of the circumstance, to stir up feelings of discontent in their minds, so that they did not scruple to vent their dissatisfaction in murmurings and complaints.

Happily, however, a remedy was nigh at hand. The Apostles wisely and opportunely interfered. They convened the disciples together, and after shewing them the unreasonableness of expecting that they should withdraw any portion of their attention from the important duties of their ministry for the purpose of superintending the distribution of the daily alms, they directed them what steps to take to put an end to the discord, and to prevent its recurrence for the time to come. The plan which they unfolded, and which was subsequently adopted, was to institute a new office in the Church—that of deacons, whose special duty it should be to pay attention to the temporal wants of the poorer members of the flock, and to make

a fair and impartial distribution of the contributions of the rich. And that they might be above suspicion, as well as highly qualified for their important trust, the Apostles directed that choice should be made of persons remarkable for their honesty, their piety, and their wisdom. "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said unto them, 'It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.'

The measure thus proposed by the Apostles was unanimously approved, and was executed without delay, as we find recorded in the words which follow: "And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip,

and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the Apostles ; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.”

Such, my brethren, was the origin of Deacons in the Christian Church, whose peculiar office it was at first to “serve tables,” i.e. to minister to the necessities of the poor, and to undertake the distribution of the church’s funds. And yet had this been their only employment, the Apostles would scarcely have been so particular in their choice of persons, or have set them apart with such marked solemnity. Their “serving tables” implied further, their attendance at the table of the Lord’s supper, which was then administered daily. And that their office in some instances extended further is evident from the case of Philip, one of these seven deacons, who is subsequently represented as preaching the gospel and baptizing.

These and similar important ends are

still kept in view in the appointment. In the ordination service of our Church we find the following statement of them as contained in the Bishop's address to the candidates for Deacon's orders. "It appertaineth to the office of a Deacon, in the Church where he shall be appointed to serve, to assist the Priest in Divine service, and specially when he ministereth the holy communion, and to help him in the distribution thereof, and to read the holy Scriptures and Homilies in the Church; and to instruct the youth in the catechism: in the absence of the Priest to baptize infants, and to preach if he be admitted thereto by the Bishop. And furthermore it is his office, where provision is so made, to search for the sick, poor, and impotent people of the parish, to intimate their estates, names, and places where they dwell, unto the curate, that by his exhortation they may be relieved with the alms of the parishioners, or others.^h

^h Ordination Service.

DEACONS

It is a subject worthy of remark that the Apostles did not themselves select the individuals who were to be appointed to the office of Deacons, but trusted to the judgment of others who had more frequent opportunities of seeing and conversing with them, and who were therefore better acquainted with their real character.

And such is the plan which is still followed by the successors of the Apostles, the Bishops of the Church. It is their province not so much to select persons from amongst the laity on whom to lay their hands, as to examine those who are recommended to them by others, and if they find them competent in learning, and are well satisfied with testimonials, and judge them to be upon the whole fit for the office, to ordain them thereto.

As far as rules, and regulations, and forms of examination, and mode of ordination are considered, nothing can be conceived more appropriate, or more likely to fence the sacred altar of our Tabernacle,

and keep off every false intruder from its precincts. But without God's blessing upon such precautions all will be in vain. See, then, brethren, that you assist in furthering the true welfare of the Church by wrestling with God for a blessing upon her ministers of every grade. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; pray that peace may be within her walls, and prosperity within her palaces. "Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." It is in this way that the most private, the most timid, the most retiring Christian can promote the salvation of mankind, and the best interests of the Church.

Permit me then to urge every one of you, who knows what prayer is, and who has learnt to pray for himself, to pray also for the Clergy of our land. Pray for the Bishops and Rulers that they may be endowed with a double portion of the influences of God's Holy Spirit, that they

may lay hands suddenly on no man, but make choice of fit and able men to serve God in the ministry of the gospel. Pray for all who from time to time shall present themselves as candidates for this sacred office, and beseech the Lord to qualify them more and more by the communications of his grace! Pray also for all the Ministers of God's word and sacraments that they may all, in their stations, glorify their Master and promote his cause in the world. Then will you be found fellow-helpers of the truth, and your prayer of faith shall be answered in showers of blessings upon your own souls, as well as upon the souls of others.

But it is time that I pass on to the remaining part of the chapter, in which St. Luke enters on the history of a very remarkable man whose name stands conspicuous amongst the seven Deacons first set apart by the Apostles, and who proved the first of Christian martyrs. In the 5th verse he is described as a man "full

of faith and of the Holy Ghost,” and in the account on which we now enter, at the 8th verse, “as full of faith and power,” under the mighty influence of which he wrought supernatural and surprising deeds. “And Stephen full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.” In both instances special mention is made of his faith. It was a principle which not only dwelt in him, but dwelt in him abundantly, filling, as it were, his whole heart and mind, and thus raising him above every fear and apprehension, and enabling him to realize the constant presence of his God and Saviour.

As there is a difference between dead and saving faith—a difference which the Apostle James as well as St. Paul distinctly marks out—so also is there a difference to be recognized in the degrees of faith which are exercised and enjoyed by different disciples, or by the same disciple at different times. Every real Christian believes to the saving of his soul,

but every one does not equally glorify God thereby, nor derive from his faith the same measure of personal satisfaction and comfort. All true believers are alike justified by faith, but not alike sanctified, much less alike strengthened and animated to “run with patience the race which is set before them.”

Now whilst the possession of even the smallest portion of saving faith is a subject of unspeakable thankfulness, yet should we seek larger and yet larger supplies. Our daily prayer should be, “Lord we believe ; help thou our unbelief. Lord, increase our faith.” Similar observations might be advanced with reference to the diversified measures of spiritual influences generally, as possessed and exercised by different Christians. That St. Stephen enjoyed a very abundant share of these spiritual influences there could be no doubt, had we been left to form our own conclusions from his character in other respects. We may trace effects to their causes with even

greater certainty than causes to their effects. His faith was the result of spiritual influence from on high. But we are not left to draw deductions—we are distinctly told that he was full of the Holy Ghost. The expression cannot but remind us of the metaphor employed by our Lord in his discourse with the Samaritan woman:—“Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” So was it with this holy and distinguished man; he was so replenished with spiritual influence that it overflowed like a fountain of running water, scattering blessings around him on every side. In his case indeed these influences were not only abundant, but extraordinary and miraculous in their character; for we are told, that “he did great wonders and miracles among the people.”

Yet strong as was his faith—deep as

was his piety—filled as was his heart with the influences of the spirit, and abundant as were his deeds of supernatural benevolence, all were insufficient to commend the testimony which he bore touching the Messiahship of Jesus to the proud theologians and contentious disputants of Jerusalem. Then there arose “certain of the synagogue which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.”

From the rancorous hostility which these societies displayed against Stephen, some have conjectured that he was formerly one of their members; and if we have reason to suppose him to have been a Hellenist, it is by no means an improbable supposition. But in vain were their attacks upon the truths of Christianity, which rested not upon human reasoning, but on the sound foundation of doctrines supported by divine revelation, and providential facts. “They were not able,” it

is added, "to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." And in this we perceive a striking instance of the fulfilment of our Saviour's parting promise to his disciples, "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist."

This attack of the Jewish scholars seems to have been a part of a premeditated scheme ; for when argument, learning, and subtilty availed not, they had recourse to a subornation of perjury : "Then they suborned men, which said, we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law : for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us."

Now as in almost all false accusations there is something really said or done which the calumniator perverts, in substance or in design, so is it here. Something, no doubt, was spoken by Stephen of the certain and speedy destruction of Jerusalem, and its magnificent Temple, if they should persist in hardness of heart and unbelief: but as to his having put any slight upon Moses, or upon the laws and institutions of Moses, nothing was further from the truth. To charge him with speaking "blasphemous words against the holy place and the law," because he testified of Christ as the great antitype of the whole, who had magnified the law and made it honourable, was false and calumnious, whatever expressions he may have used. And most forcibly does it remind us of one of the charges brought against our blessed Saviour by the Chief Priests, when after long seeking in vain for false witnesses whose testimony agreed, at last they found two false witnesses who said,

“ ‘This fellow said, I am able to destroy the Temple of God, and to build it in three days.’ ”

But let false witnesses testify as they may, there is something in conscious innocence which will go far, not only to support the individual himself, but also to corroborate his protestations in the eyes of every unprejudiced and discerning bystander. His very countenance will vindicate him from the aspersions with which his character is loaded, and he will look, as well as declare himself to be, “Not guilty.”

This, and far more than this, was observable in Stephen. Not only did his countenance betray no guilty apprehensions ; it was invested with an appearance the most engaging, and at the same time the most commanding. A certain ennobling and supernatural brightness irradiated his features, “and all that sat in the council looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”

This circumstance reminds us of a similar event in the history of Moses, whose face, we are told, shone in a miraculous manner after communing with God on the Mount. Now it was a singular coincidence, to say the least, that he whom they accused of blaspheming Moses, should at that very moment be honoured in a precisely similar manner. And the event was the more remarkable still when we remember that Moses had just received the two tables of testimony, containing among other commandments, a solemn charge not to bring false witness against a brother.

A sight such as they then witnessed could not but suffice, (one would have imagined,) to subdue their hatred and their prejudices. They beheld a countenance whose every lineament bespoke not only innocence of the charge brought against him, but distinguished approbation on the part of God. But the sight served only to astonish for the moment, and excite a vain curiosity in the bystanders:

his inexorable judges would not permit even a sign from heaven to dissuade them from their purpose.

And is there not something akin to all this in the feelings with which an ungodly world contemplate the character of a real spiritually minded, and consistent Christian in the present day? When they look at him attentively, they perceive something supernatural in the bent and turn of his mind—in the elevation of his desires—in the purity of his motives—in the self-denial which he exercises—in his love to Jesus, and in his zeal for God. They view him with surprise, but alas! with prejudice also, and dislike. They see his face like that of an angel—they see him in fact bearing something of the image of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and yet they feel no drawing of their hearts towards him. There is no affinity, and therefore no attraction. There is no similarity, and therefore no concord.

LECTURE X.

ACTS vii. 51—60.

Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.

Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

But he being full of the holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord.

And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this he fell asleep.

AT the close of a former discourse I introduced to your notice the remarkable man whose tragical death is recorded in the words before us. We beheld him arraigned before the council on the false charge of speaking reproachfully against Moses and against God; and we heard the testimony of the witnesses who declared, "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law; for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us."

Stephen having patiently listened to this false representation of his statements was in no haste to reply, but remained

silent until called upon by those in authority to speak. How his mind was then occupied it is not difficult to imagine : he was doubtless communing in spirit with his God and Saviour, and seeking that strength, and wisdom, and support, which his trying circumstances required. Nor did he seek them in vain : a flood of light and peace and joy poured into his soul, and a supernatural radiance sat upon his placid brow, such as silently but emphatically declared him to be, instead of a blasphemer, an honoured servant of the living God.

But marvellous as was the phenomenon which they beheld, the council were too much prejudiced in their opinions, too determined in their purpose, and too bitter in their hate, to be shaken or subdued. Though when they steadfastly set their eyes on him they saw his face as it had been the face of an angel, yet they persisted in treating him as a vile criminal who was not fit to live.

Yet an appearance of justice must be preserved. The accustomed mode of trial required that the prisoner should be permitted to speak in his own defence ; and accordingly the holy Martyr was called upon to say why judgment should not be given against him. The High Priest demanded, "Are these things so?" Then it was, that he, who had hitherto, in imitation of his blessed Master, when he witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate, held his peace—began to open his mouth in argument, and to shew, from the scriptures of the Old Testament, that he had advanced nothing respecting the Temple and its services but what Moses and the prophets did say should come.

Though his speech is comparatively lengthy, extending from the 2nd to the 53rd verse of this chapter, yet it is evidently but a fragment of what he would have said on the occasion, had he not met with the most determined opposition from his prejudiced and enraged audience.

It is a remark, in which most commentators agree, that the thread of the argument is broken at the 51st verse, and that in that and the two following verses the speaker seems to be expostulating with those who tumultuously endeavoured to drown his voice with noise and clamour. The drift of his intention in entering, as he does, on the history of his nation, is obvious to every enlightened student, though doubtless had he been permitted to draw his own deductions, his meaning would be still better understood.

They had accused him of predicting the abrogation of the ceremonial law, and of proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah, who was to restore all things. He refers to the call of Abraham, the Father of their nation, who though he was termed the "friend of God," had never been subject to the ceremonial law, save only of circumcision, the seal of the covenant which he had, being yet uncircumcised. And then, as to Moses—it was

well known how ill he was treated by his own age and nation, and how he was rejected by the people whom he was commissioned to deliver. And not only so, but this very Moses for whom they now professed so much regard had himself proclaimed the future advent of a still greater prophet and lawgiver, whom the nation, at their peril, must obey.

What application of this testimony of Moses St. Stephen, if he had not been interrupted, would have made, may be inferred from the use which St. Peter makes of it in his discourse recorded in the 3rd chapter, where he plainly declares it to have been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

From the times of Moses he passes on to those of Solomon, who had the privilege of erecting the first Temple ; and from the pen of the prophet Isaiah he quotes a striking testimony to the fact that the presence of Jehovah was not confined within the limits of any edifice, however

spacious, or however hallowed. The passage, as you will find it at large in Isaiah lxvi. 1, 2, is as follows: "Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house which ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord. But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

Here it was that the drift of St. Stephen's discourse began to be perceived: they felt that he was now about to draw, as a legitimate deduction from what he had advanced, that the temple and its services were not essential to the true worship of Jehovah, or to the possession and enjoyment of his favour—and that they presented to the wicked and disobedient no security whatever from the punishment which they deserved. And hence, as it would seem, they began to shew signs of

indignation so decisive, and raised so loud a clamour, that dropping the argument which he was about to pursue, he boldly rebukes them for their perverseness, and upbraids them with a too faithful imitation of the persecuting conduct of their forefathers. “Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers; who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”

Such was the faithful and uncompromising spirit with which holy Stephen rebuked the malice of his adversaries. They prided themselves on their connection with Abraham by the rite of circumcision, but he solemnly pronounces them “uncircumcised in heart and ears,” and

charges them with resisting the Holy Ghost, whose miraculous, as well as gracious influences were now so richly and abundantly poured out upon his servants. They gloried in the writings of the ancient prophets, and professed veneration for their character, and deplored the ill-treatment which they experienced at the hands of their ungrateful cotemporaries. But whilst they blamed the conduct of their ancestors, they were treading in precisely similar steps—they were at that moment persecuting the servants of the Lord. Nay, they had exceeded all their ancestors in crime ; for they had deliberately condemned and crucified the Lord of glory—the Messiah to whom all the prophets witnessed. They had become at once his betrayers, and his murderers. Of their law, too, which they had received by the ministration of celestial spirits on the mount of Sinai, they were vain and boastful, but which of them had faithfully obeyed

the law? It was manifest that not one of them had kept it.

This faithful application of the subject to their hearts and consciences was more than they could endure. The more they felt its justice, the more were their hatred and their rage increased. "And when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and gnashed on him with their teeth." The word rendered "cut" is most expressive in the original, signifying the act of sawing asunder, by which most cruel and painful mode of punishment criminals were sometimes put to death. How critically dangerous was the situation of Stephen at this moment! Surrounded by men who were exasperated against him to the greatest degree, and who even gnashed on him with their teeth, it required some extraordinary strength from above to remain firm and undaunted. Such strength was graciously afforded him. Indeed it is plainly declared that he was full of the Holy Ghost.

The Comforter was then dwelling and operating in the deep recesses of his inward mind ; and by that faith which is of the operation of God he looked with holy confidence to his Saviour, and beheld the things which are unseen and eternal. This honour indeed is more or less the lot and the privilege of all Christ's persecuted and afflicted disciples. His grace they find sufficient for them, and his strength is perfected in their weakness. The spirit helpeth their infirmities ; and when they are weak, then they are strong.

But it was no ordinary privilege of this nature that was conferred upon Stephen on this memorable occasion. This first of martyrs in the Christian Church was to be honoured with a special and miraculous privilege ; to the evidence of faith, was to be superadded the evidence of sense. The vail which separates heaven from earth, and eternity from time, was for a moment to be drawn aside to the uplifting eye of this faithful confessor, and

his courage was to be rewarded by such a vision of the Holy One and the Just, as should still further cheer and sustain him during his approaching sufferings. “He being full of the Holy Ghost looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.”

How this miraculous vision was produced we are not told—and to form conjectures upon a subject beyond the reach of our finite understanding would be worse than idle. Let it suffice us to believe the brief testimony of the Evangelist, that he saw “the glory of God”—not God himself, whom no man hath seen, nor can see—but his manifested glory—some supernatural radiance, it may be, symbolical of his presence.

He saw “Jesus,” also, “standing on the right hand of God.” Had the glory of God alone been presented to his view, feelings of awe, and perhaps, apprehensions of danger, might have overwhelmed his

soul ; but the sight of his beloved Master, invested with the garb of humanity, standing in the attitude of an advocate or intercessor at the right hand of his Father, was sufficient to render the vision most cheering, as well as solemnizing, to his mind. And so animated was he by the sight—so filled with admiration and delight—and so anxious that his persecutors should be persuaded to forego their hostility to so divine and glorious a Messiah, that he instantly makes known the vision, exclaiming with extatic rapture, “Behold! I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”

Yet it was not from the mere impulse of his overpowering feelings that he thus discloses a scene presented to no other eye than his own. He stands before the Council as a witness for Christ, and he adds a declaration of what he now saw to the many testimonies which they had already received, but received alas ! in vain !

‘Believe me,’ he seems to say, ‘I have followed no cunningly-devised fables in believing and declaring Jesus of Nazareth to be the Saviour of the world, and that though he was crucified through weakness, he now liveth by the power of God. Behold! he has given me a fresh evidence of his exaltation! Oh, wondrous sight! The portals of heaven are expanded, and the beatific vision of that unapproachable light in which dwelleth Jehovah is presented to my astonished view! And see! there stands my Lord and Saviour—there, at the right hand of that glorious symbol, I behold the blessed Jesus, whom ye took and with wicked hands have crucified and slain.’

Surely, one would have supposed, a testimony such as this, coming from the lips of one whose countenance they had just seen miraculously illuminated so as to appear like the face of an angel, must produce some salutary effect—must at least check their intemperate resentment,

and make them pause. But, instead of this, it served only to inflame their anger, and stimulate their rage to madness. "Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him." Their first attempt was to drown the voice of the heaven-taught speaker by clamorous vociferation. They then stopped their ears, lest by any possibility they should hear any more of what they chose to regard as his blasphemous words. After that they rushed upon their harmless and unresisting victim with impetuous unanimity, hurried him forth with violence from the judgment chamber, drove him beyond the walls of the city, as though it were defiled by his presence, and then put him to a violent and ignominious death. On the supposition, indeed, that he was really guilty of blasphemy, the forms observed at his execution were for the most part legal. The

blasphemer was not only to be put to death, but to be put to death by stoning.^l

There was another circumstance also observed, on this occasion, prescribed in the Mosaic law—the employment of the witnesses, on whose evidence conviction was passed, to commence the awful tragedy.^k In the present instance this direction appears to have been strictly observed; for although they were all eager to testify their zeal by taking a part in the death of Stephen, yet no one ventured to hurl a stone at him until the witnesses had deliberately aimed their first blows; for it is particularly recorded that the “witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet.”

But to whatever extent legal forms were observed in putting the pretended blasphemer to death, the passions of the council and of the people under their influence were not the less diabolical and cruel. His trial had been a mockery of

Leviticus xxiv. 10—16. ^k Deuteronomy xvii. 1—7.

justice—his defence had been interrupted—neither had they proved the things which they alleged against him. But thus it has often been, if history is to be credited, in every age and in every country. Law has been perverted to the destruction of the innocent, and oppressions the most cruel have been exercised under the shelter of forms and enactments. If in this country, and in the present age it is otherwise—if we can sit every one under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree, none making him afraid, we owe a debt of gratitude to our heavenly Father, which we can never adequately repay.

The witnesses, whose office it was to throw the first murderous missiles at the martyred Stephen, laid their clothes, as we have seen, at a young man's feet, whose furious zeal had brought him to the scene of slaughter, and who, we doubt not, was foremost in cheering on the savage multitude. Behold him standing conspicuously amid the throng, with the

rage of bigotry depicted on his countenance! Hear how he applauds the first onset of the witnesses, and encourages those around him to imitate their example, and avenge the honour of God and of his servant Moses upon a wretch who had been convicted of blasphemy. Perhaps he is seen to set a similar example himself, and to suit the action to the word. At all events the madness of his rage suffers no diminution till the mangled body of the martyr is stretched lifeless upon the ground!

And who was this fiery zealot? Who this hot and cruel youth? "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments; and his ways past finding out!" Behold in this blind, and bigoted, and persecuting young man, the future great Apostle of the Gentile Church. His name was Saul—a native of Tarsus, and a pupil of the celebrated Gamaliel. The zeal which he thus ignorantly and

mischievously employed in persecuting the disciples of Jesus, was, in the mysterious providence of God, about to be transferred to their edification, stability, and increase. The lips which now poured forth in loudest accents the language of deadly violence were presently to be employed in declaring the glad tidings of salvation, and in preaching the faith which he now laboured to destroy. What shall we say to these things? Behold a monument of mercy! a chosen vessel unto the Lord! Is not this a "brand plucked from the burning?" Exalted as he became in office, and successful as were his unparalleled labours, he never lost the humbling recollection of these days of his ignorance. Though he was not behind the very chiefest of the Apostles, yet he accounted himself less than the least of all saints, because he had persecuted the Church of God.

But not to dwell any longer on the character of this distinguished man, to

whose history we hope to have the opportunity of frequently recurring during our present course, let us return to the holy Stephen, and view him as he stood calm and unshaken amidst a shower of missiles which followed in quick succession from every side. Yet his imperturbable calmness was not that of the proud stoic, who laughs at suffering, and denies pain to be an evil. His mind was fortified by principles which blunted no feeling, but called forth the energies of devotional fervour, overcoming faith, and unquenchable love. "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The word "God" in this passage is not found in the original, nor was it necessary to have been supplied by the venerable translators. The verse would then read as follows, "They stoned Stephen, calling, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

But whichever translation we adopt, it furnishes us with an instance of prayer

directly offered up to Christ by one of his most devoted and enlightened followers, under circumstances in which he could not have erred, being at that moment filled with the enlightening, ennobling, and consoling influences of the Holy Ghost. Here, then, we have a proof, which commends itself to every unprejudiced mind, of the divinity of our Lord—of the doctrine of his Deity—of his oneness with the Father, to whom alone supreme adoration is due, or can be justly paid.

Among other valuable truths to be deduced from this prayer of the proto-martyr, is the certainty of there being a separate state between death and the resurrection. Had Stephen believed that the soul would either perish with the body or slumber for a season in the grave, he would never, surely, have besought the Saviour to receive his spirit. But he had not so learned Christ, or the destinies of his expiring saints. He believed with St. Paul, that to be absent from the body, was

to be present with the Lord ; and that when the body returned to the dust from whence it came, the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Nor is it less evident that Stephen regarded the crucified and risen Jesus as competent to receive his spirit into the mansions of the just, which he had gone before to prepare for them that love him. It was not to rescue him from his present danger—it was not to justify or pardon him that he now applied—it was to receive into his bosom and into his kingdom a soul which he had already justified, and in some measure already sanctified. It was the prayer not of hesitation and doubt, but of holy confidence and faith. “He knew in whom he had believed ; and he was persuaded that he was able to keep that which he had committed to him against that day.”

And how strikingly are we here taught to make the future felicity and glory of the immortal spirit the great object of soli-

citude in the chamber of sickness, and on a dying bed. St. Stephen was at this moment in most distressing pain and suffering, yet he thought little of his suffering body. It was his soul—his precious, his immortal soul, which engrossed all his anxieties. Would that this were universally the case with sick and dying persons! But, for the most part, it is far otherwise. The poor suffering body is clamorous for ease, and ceases not to demand every moment's anxiety and care; and nothing is heard from the lips of the afflicted patient but expressions which refer either to the body itself, or to the temporal circumstances connected with it.

Oh what insensibility is here! and what marvellous inconsistency! To be concerned for a frail tabernacle which must soon crumble into dust, and to think lightly, or to think not at all, of its spiritual inhabitant which shall dwell for ever in misery unspeakable, or in bliss too exalted to be described! Dear brethren,

let it not be so with you—think of the eternal consequences of dying to that soul, which, if you lose, it will profit you nothing to have gained the whole world. For “what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” And think of those consequences now. To postpone the consideration of them to a dying hour, is, in all probability, to postpone them for ever. If, with Stephen, you would have Jesus to receive your soul when you give up the ghost, you must with him also previously surrender yourselves to the service of God, and make his ways your delight.

What, then, is your present great concern? Is it, “What shall I eat? what shall I drink? or wherewithal shall I be clothed?” Or is it, What shall I do to be saved? How can I serve God better, and glorify my Saviour more? Remember, I beseech you, that if Jesus receive not your soul at death, and introduce it not into some mansion in his Father’s house, it will be seized, with malicious joy

and triumph, by the powers of darkness, and consigned to the dismal regions of unending woe. But if, on the other hand, you now commit yourself unto Christ in well doing, as unto a faithful Redeemer, he will not forsake you in death, but receive your disembodied spirit, and give it a place and a name among the blessed.

But the holy martyr has one more petition to offer up before he receive the last fatal blow which levels him with the dust. Affecting spectacle ! Behold him in the attitude of prayer, supplicating, not the vengeance, but the blessing of God upon his enemies. “ And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord ! lay not this sin to their charge.”

Since first the blessed Jesus set the example on his ignominious cross, which Stephen here so beautifully follows, many have been the professions of forgiveness of injuries where the disposition, alas ! has never been felt. But how vast the difference between the pretence and the

reality ! It is no ordinary attainment really to love the man who hates and vilifies and persecutes us : and few, it is to be feared, completely divest themselves of a desire to retaliate upon those who are thirsting for their blood, and triumphing in their disgrace. Fewer still, under such circumstances, feel anxious for their souls, or spend the last energies of desire in supplicating their forgiveness. Benevolence such as this is not earthly born, nor of nature's growth—it is the offspring of grace—it descendeth from above.

“ Lord ! lay not this sin to their charge ” —this sin—this dreadful—this heinous crime ! The martyr knew well the aggravated character of this sin ; but he knew at the same time, and he rejoiced to know, that it was not unpardonable—that the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin—and that if his infatuated enemies could but be brought to the exercise of repentance and faith, they might escape the judgments which such conduct deserved.

To the ear of an Almighty Saviour this prayer was acceptable,—but by the hardened multitude it was heard in vain. The soft and tender charity which it breathed sufficed not to mollify their savage nature. They repaid his love with increased hatred, and responded to his intercession by heavier blows. Another and another stone was hurled with violence, till at length the measure of their guilt was filled up in the completion of their murderous purpose.

But hear how his death is described by the sacred historian. Most remarkable is the expression employed when contrasted with the circumstances under which he expired. “And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” Beautiful, cheering, consolatory expression—an expression which had been previously hallowed by our Saviour’s adoption of it in reference to his friend Lazarus—an expression, too, which we are justified in applying to all the blessed dead who die in the Lord, whe-

ther they expire amid the sympathies and prayers of the righteous, or surrounded, as was Stephen, by the enemies of the cross—whether on the soft and tender couch of domestic comfort, or on the hard and rugged battle-field, where every prayer would mingle with cries and groans of woe. They sleep in Jesus, and none shall disturb them till the clarion of the archangel shall reverberate through the mansions of the dead : and then shall they awake up after his likeness, and be satisfied with it. “ I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him.”¹

¹ 1 Thess. iv. 13.

LECTURE XI.

ACTS viii. 1—8.

And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea, and Samaria, except the Apostles.

And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.

Therefore they that were scattered abroad, went every where preaching the word.

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing, and seeing the miracles which he did.

For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

And there was great joy in that city.

OUR last Lecture closed with a review of the Martyrdom of Stephen—a man “full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom”—and one who died, as he lived, a firm and undaunted believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. His last words declared at once his confidence in his Saviour, and his benevolence towards his enemies—that he had not only received the doctrines, but imbibed the spirit of the crucified Nazarene. Whilst the deadly missiles were hurled against him with frantic violence, he called upon God, saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

His enemies having thus gratified their rancorous hatred, left his mangled body on the field, a spectacle sufficiently horrible to strike terror into every heart, and to deter all but those who were gifted with courage from on high, from making an open profession of their attachment to

Christ. But as that was the age of Christian simplicity, and purity, and fervour, so was it also of Christian boldness. Accordingly, we read in the second verse of this chapter, that there were among the terrified disciples some courageous and pious individuals, who scrupled not to hazard the uncertain consequences of doing honour to the remains of this martyred saint—the detested victim of an infuriated populace. “And devout men,” it is said, “carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.”

The testimony thus borne to departed worth is beautifully touching. Contrast with it the pageantry and the pomp which sometimes mark the interment of those for whom no man weepeth, and learn to seek the honour that cometh of God only. Behold Dives, whilst he lived, clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day, and, when he died, buried, doubtless, with all the external honours which wealth could purchase : but

no lamentations of the devout are heard, as over one that is rich unto God ; and, alas ! in hell he opens his eyes amidst torments insupportable. Oh how infinitely to be preferred the lingering death and ignoble burial of poor Lazarus, full of sores, and an object of commiseration to the very dogs which partook with him of the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table, of whom it is recorded that he was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom.

Are any of you, my brethren, ambitious to be honoured at your decease ? Oh covet not the plaudits of those who can appreciate only your riches, your station, or your talents ;—plaudits which could give you no satisfaction in heaven, and no consolation in hell ; but seek so to live unto God through faith in his Son Jesus, as that the lamentations over your grave may be those of the pious and the devout, who love you for the truth's sake, and who hope to meet you in unspeakable felicity at the resurrection of the just.

The murder of the sainted Stephen was immediately followed by a general persecution of the believing inhabitants of the city. Instead of reflecting with sorrow and self-reproach on their barbarous cruelty, and impious opposition to the disciples of the true Messiah, the rulers and the people exasperated each other into still fiercer hostilities, so that multitudes were compelled to quit their habitations, and flee to a distance from Jerusalem. "At that time," says the sacred historian, "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem : and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles."

Why the Apostles remained behind whilst the great majority of the Church fled from impending danger, it is not difficult to surmise. They had a most important work to perform in consolidating the laws and regulations of the infant community ; and they knew that he who

had assigned them the task would preserve them in accomplishing it. The time had not yet arrived when the presence of the Apostle James alone might suffice to rule the mother Church at Jerusalem. They continued therefore awhile together in close connection, and determined many things pertaining to the kingdom of God, with an authority as indisputable as that of the Master who commissioned them.

Among the first and foremost of the persecutors of the Church was an individual whose name is first introduced to our notice in the preceding narrative of Stephen's martyrdom, where, it is said, "the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul." In the first verse of the chapter before us he is emphatically spoken of as "consenting unto his death." And in the fourth verse we are distinctly told that he exerted himself with all possible zeal against the disciples, sparing neither sex nor age.

“As for Saul, he made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.” How strong the expression, “He made havoc of the Church.” He ravaged abroad as a tiger hunting for his prey. No doors—no bars—could resist his violence. He “entered into every house”—and dragged from its peaceful fire-side to the dungeon and the stocks, every inmate on whom his suspicions fell.

Yet in all this he thought he was “doing God service.” Such is the blindness of the mind untaught by the influences of the Holy Spirit. Well may he stand in astonishment at the riches of that grace which made so cruel and unrelenting an oppressor of the Church not only a convert, but a distinguished Apostle of the truth. Had he thus persecuted Christ’s disciples otherwise than in ignorance, and blindness, and prejudice, we have reason to believe that he would have been permitted to perish in his sins. But great as was his

guilt, it was not that of deliberate rebellion against known and acknowledged truth. It was an offence against the "Son of man" which admitted of being pardoned—not the sin against "the Holy Ghost," which placed the offender beyond the reach of forgiveness. To this important circumstance the Apostle himself refers in his first Epistle to Timothy, i. 12. "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."

But not to anticipate the interesting reflections to which the subsequent narrative of St. Paul's conversion will necessarily give rise, let us proceed to notice the salutary effects which resulted from this first persecution, and consequent dispersion, of the saints at Jerusalem. In thus retreating before the storm of cruel and deadly oppression they acted in con-

sistency with the exhortation of their Master, "When they persecute you in this city, then flee ye into another." By so doing they not only preserved their lives, but became extensively useful to others. Wherever they went they related the things which they had seen and heard—which they had believed and experienced. They kept not the good tidings of salvation to themselves, but they joyfully, zealously, and affectionately declared them to all that came within their reach. Thus did God overrule the adverse calamity which befel his Church to its ultimate extension and prosperity. It led, in fact, to the propagation of the gospel not only in Judea and Samaria, but also, (as we learn from the sequel of the history,) in the remotest parts of the then known world. It is necessary, however, that we should direct our attention, for a few moments, to the language of the fourth verse, from which some persons have ventured to deduce an inference,

which is not only not authorized by the passage, but which is utterly at variance with every just notion of ecclesiastical government, as developed in the pages of the New Testament.

The words of the historian are these : “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.” And the inference drawn from them is this, that all Christians are alike authorized to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, whether set apart and ordained to the ministry or not. But this inference is grounded on two assumptions, the truth of which has been justly disputed. In the first place it is assumed that the individuals thus scattered abroad, and who exerted themselves to propagate the faith, were unauthorized or unordained by the Apostles—whereas it is quite as reasonable to believe that those of the dispersed disciples who did so exert themselves were commissioned so to do by those whom Christ straitly charged to rule and govern

his Church, as well as to propagate his truth.

But even if this assumption were true, and we were to admit that those who are represented as “preaching the gospel” were private Christians, including persons of both sexes, and of all ages and conditions, it must be still further assumed, that by the term “preaching the word” is here meant such authoritative and official teaching in the Church of Christ, as is inculcated upon those who were called to the ministry.

Now it is remarkable that the original word here rendered “preaching the word” is literally “making known the glad tidings of the word,” and quite distinct from the word employed in the next verse, and there properly rendered “preached.” If the modes in which the gospel was respectively promulged by the dispersed brethren in the 4th verse, and by Philip in the 5th, were one and the

same, how comes it that a totally different phraseology is employed in the one case and in the other? How comes it that whilst the latter regularly-appointed minister, ordained by the hands of the Apostles, is said to preach or proclaim the Messiah, to the inhabitants of Samaria, the former are said only to “communicate every where the glad tidings of the word?” Is it not evident that in the latter instance nothing more was aimed at, or professed, than that which all private Christians should still endeavour to perform, wherever, in the providence of God, they are scattered abroad, especially in heathen lands? Should they not zealously and faithfully declare their knowledge and belief of the truth? Should they not gladly avail themselves of every opportunity of disseminating the principles which they hold, whether by conversation or reading, or correspondence, or dispersion of the scriptures? Should they not speak a word in season to their

neighbours, and be ready to give to every man a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear? Assuredly they may—and assuredly they ought. Yet all this, and far more than this may be done without invading the office of the ministry, or disparaging its distinctive claims.

And how much may be done in a private and unostentatious way, by contributing to the increase of Church accommodation, and to the maintenance of fit and able men to serve God in his sanctuary—to the circulation of the Scriptures, pious books, and formularies of devotion—and to the support of schools in which the principles of pure and undefiled religion are taught. And even where the means of the individual are too limited to allow much to be done in this way, there still remains the opportunity, which every one more or less possesses, of “speaking a word in season” to a neighbour, a relative, or friend, and of letting the light of his consistent example so shine before men,

that they may glorify their Father which is in heaven.

My dear brethren, permit me to urge upon you this solemn and imperative, and, at the same time, this delightful duty. Most of you, doubtless, are much and busily engaged; and you are strongly tempted, perhaps, to think that you are justified in devoting every leisure hour to personal ease and gratification. Oh resist such an unworthy suggestion! Close your ears to the siren voice of idleness and pleasure; and remember that God and your fellow-creatures have severally a claim upon the time which you affect to call "your own." I say affect to call your own—for if indeed you know any thing of the claims of Christianity, you know that neither your time, nor your money, nor your influence, nor your faculties, are your own—nay, that you yourselves are not your own. "What!" exclaims the apostle Paul, when expostulating with the offending Corinthians,

“know ye not that your body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” It was an axiom—a thing generally understood and acknowledged in the primitive Church—that no man should live unto himself, but unto the Lord—that no man should seek his own welfare only, but the welfare of others. And how frequently do we find the Apostles calling the attention of Christians to this acknowledged principle, and urging them to act upon it, by giving all diligence to seize their opportunities of usefulness, and by being careful to maintain good works! Be ye also careful, my beloved friends! and never think that you can do enough to testify your gratitude to Him, who loved you and gave himself for you, or to make known to others the value, the freedom, the efficacy of his great salvation.

From these general but important reflections, arising from a consideration of the 4th verse, let us now pass on to the account which follows of the successful labours of Philip in Samaria. “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.” That the individual here mentioned is not Philip the Apostle is self-evident—all the Apostles being still at Jerusalem. And as Philip the Deacon is the only person of that name previously mentioned in the narrative, there can be little or no doubt that he is the evangelist here meant; and that being no longer confined to the service of tables at Jerusalem, he was authorized to act as a herald of salvation, and proclaim Jesus of Nazareth to be the true Messiah.

The city of “Samaria,” of which frequent mention is made both in the Old and New Testament, was the capital of the ten tribes, who revolted from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, in the days of Re-

hoboam, the son of Solomon, who, as well as his father David, had swayed his sceptre over the entire population. It was now, however, inhabited by the descendants of the mixed people whom the king of Assyria, (when he carried those tribes into captivity) planted in their room. At their first settlement those foreigners practised the idolatry of the countries from which they respectively came; but afterwards, in consequence of the instructions of an Israelitish priest, who was sent to teach them "the manner of the God of the land," they associated the worship of Jehovah with their own superstitious rites. It was probably from this Priest that they received the five books of Moses; and these, (corrupted in several places,) were the only books of scripture which they acknowledged. They built a Temple on Mount Gerizim, in which they offered sacrifices; and they observed the Jewish festivals, practised circumcision, and expected the promised Messiah. Of their

system of religion, as it existed in the days of our Saviour, it is difficult to obtain a distinct and satisfactory account, because the implacable enmity of the Jews led them to represent it in the most unfavourable light. From the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman it appears to have been extremely corrupt: "Ye worship ye know not what." Yet, as they professed the same religion with the Jews, how much soever they differed in some material points, they are classed with them in the language of the New Testament, and are not reckoned among the Gentiles.

From this imperfect view of the religious state of the Samaritans, it is evident that they were not better disposed than their rivals the Jews to embrace the doctrine of Christ. Their system was more erroneous—their prejudices were equally great, and their knowledge was less.

But notwithstanding all these disadvantages and hindrances, the preaching of Philip was attended with great success.

Of the subject matter of his discourses we are briefly, but significantly told: "He preached unto them Christ." How he preached, however, we are not informed; whether eloquently or plainly, whether by argument or by appeal—whether by simple declaration—or by a pointed reference to those portions of the Old Testament scriptures which they professed to believe. Alas! my brethren! how much is the manner rather than the matter of Christian discourses the subject of attention among the hearers! And how often, it is to be feared, are the pleasing emotions which the mere eloquence of a talented preacher is calculated to produce in the mind, mistaken for the renewing influence of the doctrines of the cross upon the conscience and the heart.

In preaching Christ to the people of Samaria, Philip was guided and assisted by that one Spirit which divideth unto every man severally as he willeth. His style of preaching might differ widely

from that of St. Peter, and still more widely from that of St. Paul ; but, with them, he had one common and all important truth to inculcate, and he resolved to know nothing among his hearers but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Such was the burden of his testimony. Nor did he deliver it in vain : for the Spirit of God was present to awaken the attention and penetrate the hearts of the multitudes who flocked to his preaching. “And the people,” it is said, “with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.” As in Jerusalem, so also in Samaria God glorified his Son Jesus by accompanying the preaching of his name with signs and wonders and mighty deeds. “For unclean spirits crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them ; and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.” Not that these miraculous exhibitions sufficed of themselves to pro-

duce true conversion : but it pleased God thus to honour the first introduction of Christianity into this important city—to silence gainsayers—awaken universal attention—and prepare the way for the ingress of his saving truth into the hearts of many.

That the result of this wonderful display of divine goodness among the Samaritans should be a sudden and universal rejoicing it is easy to believe. “And there was much joy, says the sacred historian, in that city.” The temporal benefits conferred upon many of its afflicted inhabitants were such as to inspire joy in the minds even of those who had no regard for their souls. Not only the immediate friends and relatives of those whose lameness had been healed, or whose evil spirits had been dispossessed, but their neighbours and bystanders, who witnessed the extraordinary cures, could not fail to sympathize in their joy and gladness.

And still, my brethren, is there similar

ground for rejoicing, wherever true Christianity prevails. The temporal blessings which follow in her train are multiplied and important. She “has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.” She humanizes—elevates—refines. She unites her followers in bonds of affection, and fills them with a spirit of benevolence, which prompts them to deeds of mercy and kindness towards all around them. Still does she heal the sick and comfort the distressed—not indeed by supernatural power, but by the outstretched hand of charity. Still does she succour those who are ready to perish, and “make the widow’s heart to sing for joy.”

But great as are the temporal benefits which the gospel ensures, they are but faint shadows of those spiritual blessings which form a still stronger ground of joy. Oh, what occasion for rejoicing, when, as in the case of many of the Samaritans, the eyes of the understanding are opened—the

fetters of sin broken—the palsy of the affections removed: when the soul is emancipated from its bondage—delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. None but those who have experienced it can tell the joy of receiving with child-like simplicity that faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Oh the happiness of feeling assured that our sins, which are many, have been forgiven us—that henceforth we are not under the law but under grace—and that being in Christ Jesus, and walking not after the flesh, but after the spirit, there is no condemnation against us! Oh the felicity of bidding adieu for ever to the “covenant of works”—to that fear which hath torment—to that spirit of bondage which clothes the Saviour himself in the robes of vengeance! Happy, thrice happy the hour when the gospel comes with its healing power into the smitten and contrite heart, and whispers

“peace”—when it bids the penitent look unto Jesus, as the Israelites looked to the brazen serpent, and live—when it says, in accents not to be mistaken, “Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.” Who indeed that considers what the gospel is—how gracious its tidings—how rich its promises—how free its offers—how blessed its effects, can doubt that, whether it enter a kingdom, a city, a family, or a solitary heart, it comes fraught in every case with joy and rejoicing!

But it is one thing to behold and acknowledge all this with reference to others, and another thing to experience it in ourselves. Permit me then, dear brethren, to recommend to you self-examination on this point. What know ye of the life-giving, joy-inspiring influences of the gospel, on your own heart and mind? Have you felt it to be the power of God unto your salvation? Has it cheered—animated—gladdened you? Has it taken from you the spirit of the slave, and im-

parted to you the spirit of adoption, so that you can now cry with child-like confidence, “Abba Father !”

If not, there is something deficient—something wrong. Perhaps you have never felt your urgent need of the salvation which is in Christ ; and then no wonder that you experience not its cheering influence. Perhaps, though you feel your need, your views of its character are indistinct and confused ; or whilst your views of the truth are correct, your efforts to act up to those views are very feeble, and remiss : and hence your heart condemns you, so that you cannot have confidence before God. Or finally, it is possible,—indeed it is not unfrequently the case,—that a constitutional depression of spirits, or a diseased and nervous frame, may prove the real hindrance to your joy.

Endeavour to ascertain the cause, and delay not to apply the appropriate remedy. Above all, hasten to the all-merciful and infallible Physician of souls, who has

pledged himself to heal all your diseases, if you apply to him in faith. Follow his prescriptions, how bitter soever to the taste ; and rest assured that he will not fail to “ bind up your wounds, pouring in oil and wine.” He will “ give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

LECTURE XII.

ACTS viii. 13—24.

Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem, heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John.

Who when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost.

(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost:

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the Apostles' hands, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

It is the glory of Christianity that it overcomes the greatest obstacles, and oftentimes achieves its triumphs in situations and circumstances the most adverse. It is not among the decent and the moral only, the refined and the intellectual of our race, that it wins its way, and accomplishes its aim: the rude, the illiterate—the superstitious, and the vile—even the profligate and profane have frequently been arrested by its irresistible voice, and subdued by its thrilling tones of mercy and compassion.

The degraded condition of the Samaritans—the idolatrous and superstitious character of their creed—and their national antipathy to the purer faith of the Jews, have already been noticed as so many hindrances to their reception of the gospel.

But in addition to these general and permanent obstacles, there existed, at the time when Philip visited them, a special and extraordinary hindrance. They were at that moment under the most baneful influences imaginable. An individual, gifted, it is probable, with more than ordinary sagacity, but as wicked and unprincipled as he was talented, had succeeded in gaining their unbounded admiration and confidence. By a sort of diabolical art, whether under the ordinary or extraordinary influence of the evil spirit, we are not informed—he effected so much that was apparently supernatural, that he completely captivated their understandings; and they scrupled not to admit

his claims to be regarded as a most extraordinary, if not a divine and superhuman being.

He is thus introduced to our notice by the sacred historian: "But there was a certain man called Simon, which before-time in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one; to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God."

Magic or sorcery was studied as a science, and highly esteemed, not only among the Chaldees, but in Egypt, in Syria, and other Eastern countries. That it consisted for the most part in skilful and rapid movements, and dexterous deception, accompanied by mysterious rites and ceremonies, the better calculated to divert and distract the attention, there can be no doubt. Nor can we doubt that Satan, the father of lies, and the grand deceiver of mankind, would gladly aid, as

far as he was permitted, every contrivance that was calculated to enthrall the human mind in superstition, ignorance, and sin.

But whether or not such impostors as Simon Magus and others were directly and immediately aided by evil spirits it is more difficult to decide. That demoniacal possessions were not unfrequent before the death and resurrection of the Prince of life, who came into the world that he might destroy the works of the Devil, is not an opinion merely, but a recorded fact. At the same time surprising feats of legerdemain, which not only deceive and captivate the vulgar, but perplex the inquiries of the most scientific beholders, are still performed in various parts of the East.

But be this as it may: the wonders which Simon Magus wrought or appeared to work, were so great and so numerous, that they completely bewitched, or, as it might be rendered, captivated and entranced them. They regarded him with

superstitious awe, and surrendered themselves up to his guidance as one divinely commissioned to govern and instruct them. Nor was it a sudden and momentary influence that he had gained over them : on the contrary it is distinctly affirmed that “to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.”

But behold ! whilst the “strong man armed kept his palace and his goods in peace, a stronger than he came upon him, and overcame him, and took from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divided his spoils.” Satan had for a while ruled over the minds of his willing captives, and Simon he had found a fitting instrument to rivet their chains. But lo ! Jesus, the Prince of life and peace, asserts his rights—sends his faithful ambassador, Philip, to proclaim his authority, and preach his gospel, and endows him with miraculous powers, sufficient not only to confirm his own testimony, but to bring to nought the

artful pretences of the sorcerer. “And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city. And when they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”

But the triumph of the cross was not yet complete. Multitudes of deluded souls had been won from the ranks of superstition, but the impostor himself would not readily yield to a doctrine, which proved so detrimental to his authority and influence. At length, however, even Simon Magus was subdued before the march of Christianity, and was constrained to do homage to the truth and power of the gospel. “And Simon himself be-

lieved also : and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.”

The sequel of the narrative proves to us but too clearly that the faith which this wretched man professed was not genuine ; and yet, that he had a strong conviction on his mind of the truth of Christianity, is equally clear. The wonderful cures which were wrought by the Evangelist, without the use not only of ordinary and appropriate means, but even of charms, and spells, and incantations, convinced him that he was a messenger sent from God, and that the tidings which he brought were really from above. He had sagacity enough to perceive that the wonderful works which he beheld were strictly supernatural—that they could not be accounted for on principles of sorcery, or magic, or legerdemain. He beheld not dexterity and skill, but energy and power—not the art of man, but the finger of God. Had

it been in his power to detect any flaw or suspicious circumstance in any one of those marvellous cures or dispossessions, he would gladly have made the exposure. But he could not : the miracles were clear and undoubted : it was in vain to object aught against them : and nothing remained for him but to express publicly his assent to the doctrine which they were intended to establish.

In alleging therefore that his faith was not genuine, I mean, not that he doubted the truth of what he professed to believe, but that his faith was simply the result of evidence forcing itself upon the understanding, unattended by that renewing influence of the Holy Ghost, which alone can sanctify and change the heart. It was the faith of which St. James speaks, which he describes as “dead, being alone”—as the faith which “the devils” possess in their state of everlasting perdition, who “believe and tremble,”—not “the faith of the operation of God.”

But though his heart was unrenewed his mind was deeply interested in what he saw and heard. He not only claimed the privilege of baptism, but after receiving that solemn rite he frequented the society of Christians, and accompanied Philip from place to place, wherever he went throughout the city, astonished at the wonderful miracles which he beheld.

For a while the unsoundness of this man's character remained undetected. On his profession of faith he was charitably supposed by the Evangelist, and those around him, to be a real disciple, and was admitted through the waters of baptism into the sacred inclosure of the Church. But an opportunity soon occurred which served the important purpose of manifesting the real state of his heart before God ; and it was reserved for the Apostles Peter and John both to expose and denounce it.

As yet the labours of Philip were unaided by the presence and authority of

any superior minister ; and though he had met with most abundant success, and multitudes received his message with joy, yet was it highly expedient that his testimony at Samaria should be confirmed, as well by the lips of the Apostles, as by the gift of the Holy Ghost, which was bestowed by the imposition of hands, and in answer to prayer. Accordingly, we are told, that no sooner did tidings of Philip's success reach Jerusalem, than the whole body determined to depute two of their number to visit the interesting scene of labour, and to confirm the converts in their belief of the truth. “Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost, (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them : only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost.”

From this passage it is evident, that how richly soever the Evangelist Philip was endowed with the gifts and graces of the holy Spirit in his own soul—and how marvellously soever he was enabled to perform miracles for the awakening of the attention, and the confirming the faith of the disciples, yet he possessed not the power of conferring upon them any of those spiritual gifts which are comprehended under the expression “the Holy Ghost.” To impart those supernatural influences—or rather to be instrumental in imparting them, was the privilege of the Apostles exclusively. To them, and to them alone, was it given, as the first heralds of salvation, and the supreme rulers of the Church, and by this special prerogative their credentials were indisputably and irrefragably sealed.

That the gifts thus bestowed were distinct from the ordinary, renewing, and sanctifying influences of the Spirit, is sufficiently evident from the statement just

quoted: "As yet the Holy Ghost was fallen upon none of them." They had already experienced the converting and purifying influence of divine grace, without which they could neither have repented nor believed aright. Already had they been born again of water and of the spirit, and become partakers of peace and joy in believing. We have the authority of our Lord himself for declaring, that no man can come unto him, except "the Father, which sent him, draw him"—except by the secret energies of his grace he turn the bias of his affections and his will. It follows, therefore, as an indisputable conclusion, that by "the Holy Ghost," which the sacred historian says had not yet been given to the converts at Samaria, is meant some peculiar and extraordinary effusion of spiritual influence, differing in its character and effects, though proceeding from the same source. And though this miraculous dispensation of the Spirit was not imme-

diately connected with the sanctity and salvation of the favoured recipients, yet it cannot but be regarded as a high and exalted privilege, and well calculated to advance the interests of Christianity, and confirm the faith of those who beheld it. It served the character of a witness from on high ; and, as a “ seal,” it ratified the covenant into which they had entered with God.

Peter and John, therefore, prayed that God would bestow upon the Church at Samaria the same privilege which had been so liberally conferred upon the believers in Jerusalem. Their prayer was accompanied by an outward and visible sign of the thing signified ; for whilst they prayed, or rather, after they had prayed, they “ laid their hands” upon those who were to be thus distinguished, and they received the Holy Ghost.

But to what extent was this privilege conferred ? Was the miraculous gift of the spirit granted to all who believed and

were baptized? This can scarcely be maintained. Yet it is equally improbable that it was confined, as some commentators imagine, to those whom the Apostles selected to be pastors and rulers in the Church. The medium opinion between these two extremes is generally allowed by learned and judicious expositors. Though the Holy Ghost was largely and liberally poured out upon "all flesh," i.e. upon persons of all ranks, condition, age, and sex—yet to those who were about to sustain some important offices in the Church he seems more especially to have been given. Such persons are spoken of more than once as men "full of the Holy Ghost"—men replenished with those elevating, ennobling, and extraordinary powers which marked them out as chosen vessels of the Lord. We must not, however, conceive that the effects of this miraculous effusion were in all gifted persons either the same in degree, or the same in kind. On the contrary we learn

from St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, xii. 4—11, that they were very different. "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the spirit, the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same spirit. To another, faith by the same spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same spirit. To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues. But all these worketh that one and the self-same spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."

Such were the important ends for which the extraordinary gifts of the spirit were bestowed, in that extraordinary age.

And as they were peculiar to that era, when the risen Saviour would have his claims to the Messiahship vindicated and confirmed, and the commencement of his reign specially honoured, so were they peculiar also in reference to those who were instrumental in bestowing them. On the Apostles alone, and those to whom they delegated their authority, was this high prerogative bestowed. And exalted indeed was the honour when we regard it in its proper light. To be endowed not only with power to work miracles, but with the privilege of conferring that power upon others—what earthly glory can be compared with it? The dignity of all worldly rank and station sinks, in the comparison, into utter insignificance.

Simon Magus felt it to be so. He admired—he wondered—he stood astonished at the sight! But avarice and ambition soon turned his admiration into a covetous and passionate desire to participate in the honour. He was aware

that he was no longer "some great one" in the eyes of the multitude. But, oh! if he could do what the Apostles did, he should be great indeed! Such would be his reasoning if ambition swayed him. And when avarice spoke, it told him of the possibility of his turning such power to pecuniary profit, and thus recover the golden traffic which he had lost whilst deceiving the people. He could then make merchandize of souls, and sell for silver and gold that which thousands would more highly prize. But how could he obtain this power? What inducement could he offer to the Apostles to bestow it upon him? They were evidently poor men. They brought with them no costly equipage—they bore none of the trappings of wealth. In fact their outward circumstances ill accorded with the unparalleled power and dignity which they possessed. A little money, therefore, he conceived, could not but prove acceptable. And judging of others by himself, and sup-

posing that these holy men were influenced by similar motives and desires, he determined to tempt their cupidity. "He offered them money, saying, give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." Base and infamous proposal! Wretched and infatuated man!

But see how his countenance has fallen—what confusion and dismay has overtaken him! What has occurred to paralyze that tongue, ere it had well nigh given utterance to the words? By what spell has that arm been unnerved which had just been presenting the proffered gold? It was the eye of Peter flashing with holy indignation as he turned to look upon him—gazing upon his countenance as did the Prophet aforetime upon Hazael, until he was ashamed. It was the awful and solemn voice which gave utterance to a reproof the most withering and terrific: "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be pur-

chased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

Most awful was this reply, yet characterized by a concern for the offender, no less than by an abhorrence of his crime! The expression, indeed, with which it opens, might seem at first sight to betray a wish that the deserved punishment might be awarded him: "Thy money perish with thee." But that this is not its meaning is evident from the earnest exhortation with which the Apostle closes his reproof: "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." It is simply an expression of horror at his impious proposal, and of the loathing with which he regarded such filthy lucre.

And yet, though it conveyed no wish that Simon Magus should be destroyed, it did intimate very strongly the perilous situation in which he stood. "As for the money with which he thus basely and profanely tempted him, let it perish, as he richly deserved to do himself. His proposal to purchase the divinely imparted gift with silver and gold betrayed such dishonourable thoughts of God, such hardness and insensibility of heart, as well as darkness of the understanding, and such sacrilegious covetousness of disposition, that perish he must in such a state of mind." But to convince him more fully of his perilous condition, he added, in the plainest and most unequivocal terms, that "he had neither part nor lot in the matter, for his heart was not right in the sight of God:" and further, that "he perceived that he was in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

"This was plain dealing," observes a quaint, but admirable commentator, "and

plain dealing is best when we are dealing about souls. Yes, brethren! and with God's help, so will I deal with you. In the spirit of plain dealing I would beseech you to inquire if, though not sinning after the similitude of Simon's transgression, you are nevertheless in a similar condition as to the safety of your souls? His is not a solitary instance of believing, and being baptized, and communing with the Church, and yet all proving at length a complete failure and disappointment. "Examine yourselves therefore whether ye be in the faith: and let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

We preach to you the glad tidings of a free and full salvation through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We shew you the greatness of his mercy, the value of his atonement, the riches of the inheritance which he has purchased for his followers. We exhibit to you the triumphs of his cause, not now indeed by signs and

wonders and mighty deeds, such as the Apostles wrought on the bodies of mankind, but by similar and equally powerful effects on their hearts and lives. We declare to you that this Jesus, as he is now the Saviour, so will he ere long become the Judge of men, and that to escape his frown then, we must secure his favour now. On these and similar topics we address you from time to time, and apparently with good success. You appear to feel the force of what we advance—your attention is arrested—your assent is gained—you proclaim yourselves converts—and you confirm your baptismal vows in the maintenance of fellowship with the Church. For a season all appears right and satisfactory. You come among the true worshippers of God, and you sit as they sit. They suspect you not, and you suspect not perhaps your own selves. But ere long some event takes place which places you in a new position, and surrounds you with unexpected temptation,

and you then discover to others, if not to yourselves, that your “heart is not right with God,” and that whilst you claim to be considered a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of Heaven, you have “neither part nor lot in this matter.” Then is it perceived with mingled sorrow, indignation, and pity, that you are “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity”—that you are an offence to that Saviour whose name you professed, and in thralldom to that usurper whose dominion you renounced.

But there may be those amongst us whose sins do resemble, in some degree, the transgressions of Simon Magus. For let me ask you, dear brethren, if motives of a worldly character do not sometimes mingle with your almsgivings and prayers. Are we so free from this charge that there is not one amongst us who shapes his conduct rather by what his pious superiors will approve of, than by what his conscience

dictates, and the love of the Saviour enjoins? Are there none here who affect to be godly for earthly gain? Are there none here who follow Christ for "the loaves and fishes," which he distributes more or less, in his providence, amongst his professed disciples? Oh, search and see, and pray God that he may cleanse the thoughts of your hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit. You need forgiveness for the indulgence of such by-ends: they are at all times odious to God, and when discovered, are hateful even unto men.

But how are you to obtain forgiveness? Precisely in the same manner in which Simon Magus was exhorted to obtain it—by repentance and prayer: "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Inferior in magnitude as your guilt may be, compared with that of the sorcerer, yet must you seek its forgiveness in the same way, and

from the same source. There is not one mode of pardon for the lesser, and another for the greater offender : all, without exception, must cast themselves in humility and penitence and faith at the footstool of divine mercy, smiting upon their breasts, and crying, "God be merciful to us sinners." To seek forgiveness in any other way, and with any other temper of mind, is to seek it in vain.

In the awful case of Simon Magus it might seem indeed that there was no hope—that his doom was fixed—that his destruction was sealed. But no ! tremendous as was his guilt, and dangerous as was his state, there was a possibility that his offence might be forgiven. It approximated, indeed, in character, to the unpardonable sin—to the sin against the Holy Ghost—but it would seem from the language of St. Peter that it was not absolutely such, and that therefore the door of penitence and supplication was still open to the offender. And open it is to you,

ye backsliding children, whose consciences accuse you of wandering from the paths of virtue and religion. Yes! I repeat it: It is open unto you—unto all of you—unto every one of you. I wish to convince you of this cheering truth, in opposition to the desponding suggestions of the evil one, who first tempts men to sin, and then to despair of pardon. Under the influence of this species of delusion they either give way to melancholy, or rush into still greater depths of iniquity: in both cases the conclusion at which they arrive is the same, “that there is no hope.” “There is no hope,” says the one—and therefore prayer and penitence are in vain. “There is no hope,” exclaims the other: “but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.” Oh reject such horrible ideas—repel such soul-destroying suggestions. Resist the Devil when he thus tempts you to despair of mercy—resist him with the sword of the

spirit, which is the word of God. Say, Get thee behind me, Satan. It is written, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." It is written, "Oh Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help." It is written that "whosoever cometh unto Christ he will in no wise cast out."

If Peter was apprehensive of the final destruction of Simon Magus, it was not so much from the enormity of his offence, as from the state of mind which that offence betrayed. He perceived him to be in a spiritual condition the most unpromising as to the future. Nor was the reply which he received from the sorcerer at all calculated to diminish his apprehensions: "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me." There is no indication here of poignant sorrow and heartfelt concern

for his sin : a natural reluctance to suffer the punishment which he feared might be inflicted upon him was all that he expressed. He deprecated the merited judgment, but neither desired nor experienced a change of heart.

The testimony which ecclesiastical history bears to his future career of blasphemy and imposture is but too conclusive. And he stands for ever an indestructible witness to the power of Satan to harden and delude his willing subjects—an awful example of a heart not right with God, whilst professing to admire his ministers, and receive his truth !

Thank God if your hearts are not thus hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. But trifle not with your convictions : delay not your return : defer not your repentance. To-day if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. To-day there is mercy—to-morrow there may be none. To-day you have your health, your senses, your reason, to-morrow they

may all have fled. To-day your heart is comparatively tender—to-morrow it may be steeled against every impression. To-day you listen with some complacency to the promises and invitations of the gospel: to-morrow you may become like the deaf adder, which stoppeth her ear, and refuseth to hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

WORKS

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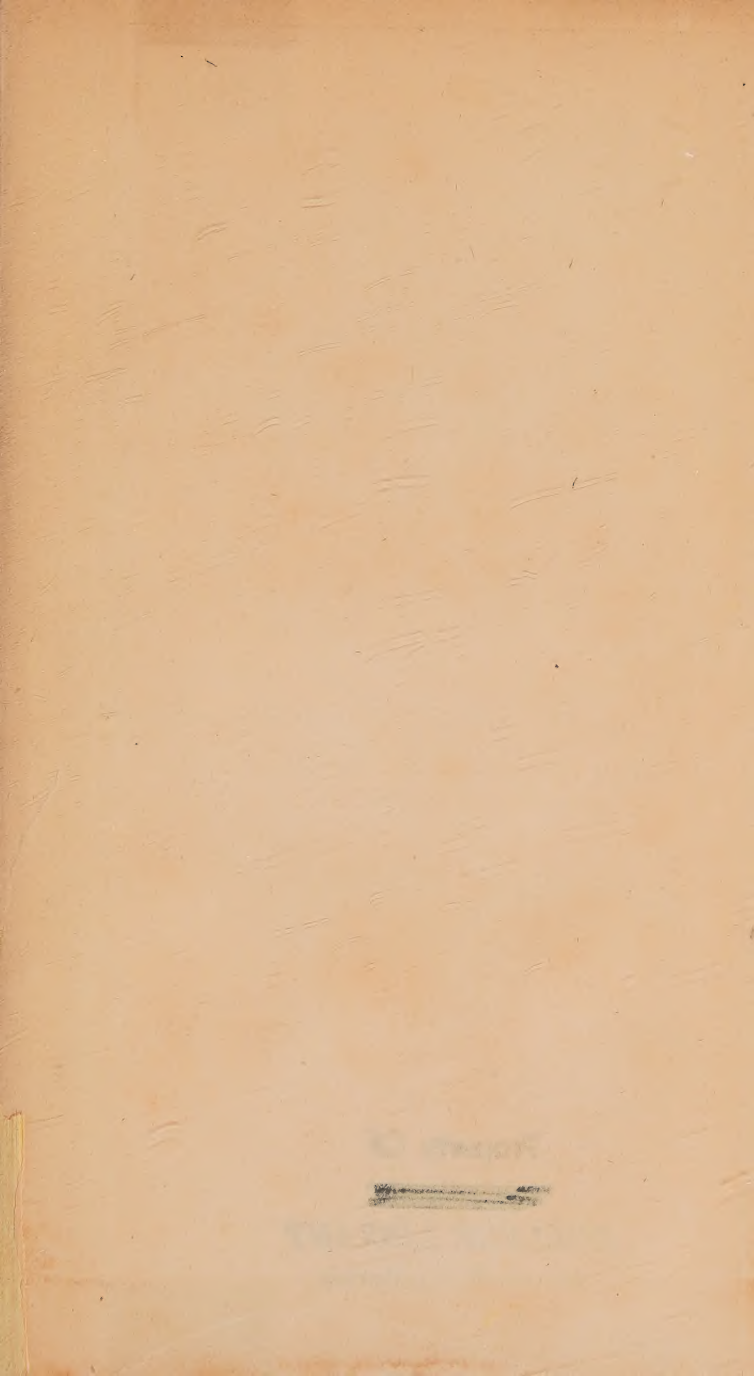
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